

A World Elsewhere

Images of Kolkata in Oriya Autobiographies

edited by
Jatindra K. Nayak

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Postgraduate Department of English (DRS I)
Utkal University
in association with
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Co-ordinator's Note

This volume brings together the translations produced in the workshop organised during 28-29 March 2009 under the auspices of the English Department's DRS I programme under SAP. Although the second workshop to be organized, this is the first publication undertaken under the SAP in the designated thrust area, "Translating Orissa". The occasion of this publication should serve as an opportunity, therefore, of reminding ourselves of the goals with which we started and the directions in which we are headed.

The project *Translating Orissa* was meant to make available to readers and researchers a corpus of translated works related to the evolving cultural topography of Orissa in its colonial and postcolonial manifestations. Its focus was on the archival materials which bore the traces and inscriptions of this unfolding cultural history. Usually these are materials that readers know little about, although they form the condition of production of masterworks and, hence, the raw material of research into and interpretation of Oriya society and culture.

For the last one decade and more translation of Oriya works into English has gathered momentum and proceeded apace. As a result of this, Orissa has a thriving culture of translation into English now. Many seminal works in poetry, fiction, drama and non-fiction have been made available in English translation, some of them visible nationally and internationally. The rich context of the

production of these works, be it in the form of debates and polemics on the question of language and identity in the dusty periodicals and newspapers or of encounters with institutions, values and sites of modernity as recorded in pages of travel books and autobiographies, is proving to be increasingly important. Here translation is the inevitable medium. English Department has an opportunity to make itself relevant by responding to the demands of the time. It can act as the real bridge between the local context and the global scene.

Thus the project has set itself a two-fold task: that of skill building through actual production of translations and of the fostering of a historical sense as shown in the ability to identify and document a given stage or phase in the cultural history of Orissa. The second workshop was focused on Orissa's encounter with modernity in the early decades of the twentieth century. To give it point and focus it was thought proper to single out one phenomenon or event or monument that mediated this encounter with especial force and clarity. Calcutta was the obvious choice as the contested site of this Oriya modernity. The project got itself a local habitation and name: *A World Elsewhere: Images of Kolkata in Oriya Autobiographies.* I take this opportunity to thank Dr. Jatindra Kumar Nayak for conceiving the project, for directing the workshop and for readying the material for publication. My thanks are due to Sri K. K. Mohapatra, writer and translator, for having keynoted at this workshop, to Dr. Sayantan Dasgupta of the Dept. of Comparative Literature of Jadavpur University for having acted as the chief resource person at the workshop and to Dr. Bikram K. Das for having delivered the valedictory address. We are happy to be printing the keynote address as an afterword in this volume. I record my deep sense of gratitude to Prof. Sarat C. Satapathy who gave

considerable support to the book project in his capacity as Head of the Department then. All my colleagues deserve thanks for contributing to the developing project. Special thanks are due to Dr. Kalyani Samantray, Reader, who joined the Department more than a year after the workshop was conducted, but whose keen editorial involvement with the text vastly improved its quality. I thank all the translators and editors who gathered under the English Department's roof for two heady days to give the project shape and form. Finally I thank Grassroots for undertaking the production and publication of the book.

Himansu S. Mohapatra

Professor of English and Co-ordinator, DRS I

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Calcutta as a major city of the British Empire towards the end of the eighteenth century was an event of great significance for people of India, especially for those living in its eastern part. It was already a centre of vigorous commercial transactions; it now made its presence felt as the centre of imperial power and grandeur. No wonder then that it functioned like a magnet which drew people to it from different parts of India and the world. The Chinese, Armenians, Jews, the English, the Dutch, the Portuguese and Oriyas, Marwaris, Punjabis, Telugus, Tamils and Anglo-Indians formed the fascinating cultural and ethnic mosaic of the city.

For several reasons Oriyas had started migrating to Calcutta in large numbers in search of a living even before the British annexed Orissa in 1803. The 18th century was a time of great misery for the people of Orissa. The province was devastated by famines and the political turmoil resulting from the decline of Mogul power and the misrule of the Marathas. Oriyas therefore started going to Calcutta in large number in search of livelihood. Many of them made a living by working as palanquin bearers. They had found a generous patron in Maharaj Nabakrishna Dev. In Thomas Motte's *A Narrative of a Journey to the Diamond Mines of Sumbhulpoor* (1786) one comes across a hilarious account of Oriya palanquin-bearers in Calcutta going on a strike and making the lives of their British masters miserable. As the century progressed, the harbour, the new industries

and factories and trading establishments created a demand for cheap labour and a large number of Oriyas came to settle in various parts of Calcutta as labourers, cooks, servants, plumbers, masons and small traders. In the 19th century, Oriyas emerged as a highly visible language group in Calcutta. An estimate made in 1901 tells us that there were thirty thousand Oriyas in Calcutta, which had four hundred thousand Bengali speakers in its population. This number kept growing and by 1971 there were three hundred thousand Oriyas in Calcutta. To many in Orissa it had become a second home. Whole streets in Calcutta came to be known as Oriya settlements. But it would be a mistake to suppose that they were always received with open arms by their hosts. On account of their poverty, the Oriyas came to figure as butts of ridicule in Bangla literature and conversational exchanges. The life of these Oriyas has been meticulously documented by Krushna Chandra Bhuyan in his *Unabinsa Satabdire Kalikatare Odia* (1990). Sumanyu Satapathy provides interesting information on the emergence of the Oriya as a figure of fun in Bangla nonsense verses in his book *The Tenth Rasa* (2008).

Another important trend in patterns of Oriya migration to Calcutta manifested itself in the mid-nineteenth century. Members of the nascent Oriya middle class became conscious of the opportunities Calcutta opened up for acquiring western education. In the early part of the 19th century Orissa had very few schools and no colleges. It is not surprising therefore to find that Madhusudan Das, Radhanath Ray and Gaurisankar, all intimately associated with the shaping of modern Orissa, went to Calcutta to receive western education, which would equip them to survive and flourish in the emergent colonial order.

Fakir Mohan Senapati's autobiography, written in the second

decade of the twentieth century, contains a light-hearted account of one such journey to Calcutta. After passing his entrance examinations, Radhanath Ray travelled from Balasore to Calcutta, accompanied by an elder relative, to enrol himself in the F.A. course in a college there. But he decided to return to Balasore, Fakir Mohan says, because he had difficulty in finding a place in this vast city where he could answer the call of nature.

However, as time passed, Calcutta disclosed its more attractive aspects to the Oriya migrants. It not only provided opportunities for making a living or acquiring education; its anonymity and vastness now offered opportunities for pleasure, licit as well as illicit. Baishnab Pani, reknowned poet of the masses, for instance, tells us about the yatras he put up there and the competition with other yatra performers he entered into. He also talks about the girl he took to Calcutta having eloped with her. Biswkesh Tripathy informs us that he went to Calcutta for he keenly wanted to take table lessons from a maestro there. As the political situation undergoes a change at the beginning of the 20th century, anti-British political activists in Orissa find in the sprawling, populous metropolis a safe haven. Young Gobinda Mishra gives the police of Daspalla the slip and goes off to Calcutta, where he meets Subhas Bose, who advises him to contact C. F. Andrews and Tagore, who, in their turn, advise him to approach Mahatma Gandhi for help. This chain of events finally leads to Gandhi's visit to Orissa in 1921. Similarly, decades later, Pabitra Mohan Pradhan escapes from jail in Talcher, travels to Calcutta, where he works as a domestic servant in a Bengali household to escape the attention of the secret police. Godabarish Mishra gives a vivid account of his life as a student in Calcutta and the politically charged atmosphere in the early decades of the twentieth century, which bought him in contact with new ideas and

a new sensibility. Several writers, scholars, artists, actors from Orissa were shaped in the crucible of the city of Calcutta. Oriya magazines came to be published from here and Oriya films were shot in the studios of Calcutta.

In short, to the Oriyas who went to Calcutta, lived there and returned from there, the city not only provided new opportunities but served as a window to the world. It is impossible to tell the story of the advent of the modern in Orissa without taking into account the shifting, love-hate relationship with Calcutta. It is from Calcutta that Fakir Mohan got the first printing press in Balasore. The advertisements of gadgets, books and medicines, which appeared in Oriya almanacs, the largest selling books in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Orissa, were often printed in Calcutta. Brahmos from Calcutta visited Cuttack and other places in Orissa, set up worship halls, and challenged orthodox Hinduism, thereby leading young men and women in Orissa to interrogate their deeply held beliefs and cherished institutions. The writings of Bankim Chandra, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Tagore and many other Bengali authors exercised a profound influence on the minds of writers and intellectuals in Orissa.

It would, however, be wrong to omit to mention ways in which the Oriya presence in Calcutta enriched the city. The contribution Oriyas made to the economic prosperity of the city is too obvious to bear repetition. A significant contribution to the cultural life of the city was made by performers like Baishnab Pani and Gopal Dash. Brilliant academics like Nilakantha Dash, Binayak Mishra, Gopabandhu Chowdhury, Krushna Chandra Panigrahy and Pranakrushna Parija made their presence felt in the academic world of Calcutta.

There is no better way of understanding this relationship and

the manner in which the city shaped modern Orissa than by going through autobiographical accounts relating to the Oriyas' complex, many-hued perception and experience of Calcutta. The excerpts from Oriya autobiographies exploring images of Calcutta or Kolkata, as it is now called, one hopes, will facilitate and deepen our understanding of this unique and many-sided relationship.

Jatindra K. Nayak

House No. 9
Godabarish Mishra

Translated by Snehaprava Das

The role played by a small, non-descript house in a deserted alley of the city of Calcutta is not insignificant in the last thirty years' history of Orissa. The house, though a double-storied one, was old-fashioned and ill-designed. The rooms were too small and not well-ventilated. The smoke from the kitchen could not come out of the rooms as quickly as it entered there. Though, now, the house has electrical wiring, there was no electricity in those days. About fifteen young men had to spend three years of their prime youth in that house.

There was a small garden in the front yard of the house. It appeared as if all the small and large flowering plants of the garden hid themselves in the background of a *neem* tree they choose as their representative, which stood like an image of a starving decrepit. When flowers came to that tree in the month of *Chaitra* in late spring, instead of being plucked to be strung into a garland of some youthful fancy, they found their way to the kitchen to be used for preparing pancakes of *neem.* But the life of bitterness that Nature had given the tree was made sweet in some other manner. The camera of Chintamani that was a habitual captor of beautiful images had caught the tree's picture in its loving embrace a number of times. The picture of lotus petals that the poetry of Padmacharan describes was probably drawn at the sight of its bitter-tasting flowers. Poet Neelakantha can only say if the sight of the tree had

inspired him to write his famous love-lyric *Pranayinee.* As for me, I feel that the ideas of *Kalika* and *Kishalaya* must have been collected from the rich store-house of its dry, withered leaves.

The ground floor rooms in most of the houses at Calcutta were not fit to live in. But strangely, a number of men offered to live in the ground floor rooms of that particular house. The post box where the post man put the letters was on the ground floor. Every week some four or five letters were put in that box. The addresses on the letters were written in neat and beautiful handwriting which looked like striking designs drawn by some painter. Those letters were priceless for some of the inmates; they were not just letters but the embodiments of their loved ones. Some touched the letters to their lips to drink the nectar of love; some held their letters close to their hearts and some took them away to open them in the privacy of their rooms. As soon as the postman arrived the inmates swarmed around him, the scene looked almost like the crowd at the *Varuni Yatra* or the rush of consumers that is seen these days in front of a shop that sells provisions in a control quantity at a subsidized price. Those who first got hold of the letters first did not hesitate to blackmail their friends. 'I shall give you money for a *paan*,' someone promised his blackmailer friend to get his precious letter from him. Another blackmailer demanded *rasgullahs*. To get a *paan* was easier; but *rasgullahs* too *were* not difficult to be got. I myself neither chewed a pan nor bribed anyone with one. But I was lucky to have *rasgullahs* more than once on such occasions.

About fifty thousand letters from Orissa must have arrived at the address 'House No. 9, Panchanan Ghose Street. Nearly one thousand horse-drawn cabs must have reached there at different times, carrying Oriya young men. The house was taken on lease by the government and was named as "Student's Hostel". Young men from Orissa who received stipend and studied law at the city formed

a large section of the boarders there. Their Bengali classmates teased them by addressing them as 'the darling sons-in-law of the British Government'. Though an elderly person, the warden of the hostel maintained an amicable relationship with the young inmates. There was a reason behind it. Letters too came in his name in envelopes on which the address was written in Bengali in beautiful handwriting. Some of us demanded *rasgullahs* from him in return. But he had to bribe us with five to six times the number of *rasgullahs* that was ordinarily demanded. An amount of one *anna* as bribe was fixed for every three years of difference in age between the writer and the receiver of the letter. Those days one could get two *rasgullahs* of fine quality for one *anna*.

The warden was about forty five years of age. He married the girl the proposal of whose marriage had actually come for his son. He had another peculiarity. The man had never stepped in a particular room of the hostel. The room was small, so too was its door. He could have entered the room moving sideways, but he had never tried that. If someone suggested him to make a trial he would retort in Bengali (his mother tongue), "You want to see the fun, don't you? I am not interested."

Year by year a large number of Oriya young men with a promising start to career had flocked into House No. 9. It was not of much importance how much knowledge about matters related to legislation they gained. But most of them returned home adorned with a degree of law. Some of them like Bipin Bihari Ray, Neelkantha Babu and I could not even acquire the degree. Whenever I come across a wheat-grinder machine now, I remember the house at Calcutta and its young boarders. Whole wheat grains are put at one end of the machine and collected from the other end in a powdered form. When that is put through a sieve, first comes out the finely powdered flour, then the slightly coarse wheat powder and the

coarser semolina follows, and finally the husk. Try as hard as you may but nothing comes out after that. A variety of delicious food items can be prepared from the flour, wheat and semolina. But if these are kept unused and uncooked for a long time, they get spoilt and have to be thrown away. These days food grains are sold in controlled quantities and large amounts of provisions are hoarded in government-owned godowns. When rendered useless on account of being kept unused for long, those food-grains are thrown away. We read about it in the newspapers.

House No. 9 was like a wheat-crusher. Smooth flour, coarse wheat powders, coarser semolina and even husk came out of it over the years. Birakishore Ray became the Chief Justice of the High-Court, and Lakshmidhar Mohanty, a member of the Public Service Commission. Bichitrananda Das could be appointed as the Advocate General even though he had crossed the maximum age-limit prescribed for the post. Ramesh Chandra Mishra could rise up to the cadre of the District Judge. These were my one-year seniors. Some were appointed as sub-judges. Vidyadhar Mohapatra became a minister in the province of Mayurbhanj. A few became college teachers and deputy magistrates. Still there were a few more who did not achieve much in their lives and were rendered useless like the spoilt food grains. While some of them have fallen preys to time, some are still alive. All of them had lived in House No. 9 for some years in their youth. While some earned lots of money and established themselves as important figures of the society, some others struggled hard to earn their livelihood. But there is no doubt that the story of the lives of all those young men can provide valuable stuff to write the history of Orissa and Oriya people during that half-century.

Many debates and deliberations on the issue of building up an independent national identity of Orissa had taken place in that house.

Oriyas who lived in Calcutta at that time were afraid to reveal their identity. By 1910 the number of Oriya labourers in Calcutta, who worked on daily wage basis had gone up to more than a hundred thousand. But they had lost their individual identity. I spoke to many Oriyas living there. When asked a question in Oriya they answered in broken and ill-articulated Bengali. A sarcastic term *Udie* was coined to discriminate against the Oriyas. The term had acquired such pejorative associations that it was used to jeer at any one who made a mistake, be he an Oriya, or a man from the northern part of India, a Madrasi or a native of Bengal itself. The plays enacted in theatres mocked at Oriyas who worked as labourers and menials. As a result of all these humiliations the Oriyas at Calcutta had to live a life of misery and suffering even though their number constituted one-tenth of the total population of the city. In almost all the Bengali households, there were Oriya cooks and Oriya domestic helps. These Oriyas mingled with one another in the social institutions of the Bengalis in the city of Calcutta.

Besides the Oriyas who worked as cooks and domestic helps in Bengali households, there were some who were educated and well to do. Most of them had settled there permanently and spoke Bengali. This indicated the extent to which they were overpowered by adversity. There are many Bengalis who have been living in Orissa for the last three to four hundred years. They are scattered everywhere. The number of these Bengalis living in Orissa would approximately be fifty percent of its total population. They cannot speak fluent Bengali and distort the language with their faulty pronunciation. Still they have not given up the practice of talking in their mother tongue. Perhaps there is some sort of an element of glamour that distinguishes the city of Calcutta and underlies the Bengali politics which has considerably impacted the Oriya mindset. Several investigations were made before bringing together the parts

of Orissa which were left in the neighboring states in order to form independent Orissa. At that time many Oriyas living in Midnapur had asked, "Where shall we get a Rabindranath, a Jagdish Chandra Bose, a Chittaranjan Das and a Calcutta in Orissa?"

The educated Oriyas who travelled to Calcutta from time to time suffered from a similar mindset too. There was one incident of a lecturer of Cuttack College introducing himself as 'Some' Bandopadhyaya of Krishna Nagar in a garment shop at Calcutta. Since he had changed his surname only and kept his first name unchanged and since I do not intend to expose his identity here, I am using 'Some' in place of his first name. There was another such incident where the son of a reknowned Oriya poet had preferred to introduce himself as a Bengali. The Oriya young men who went there to study law had divided themselves in two groups. While I was there to appear for the B.A examination, I had seen these two groups behaving in a funny way. The boys in one group talked to one another in Bengali while the ones in the other group deliberately walked a little behind and jeered at them in a loud voice. It was but quite natural that the boys in the first group did not have the moral courage to retaliate. Even the great Kulabruddha Madhusudan, as a result of his few years of stay at Calcutta in his young age, talked with the Oriyas of Orissa in Bengali. But how many such independent-minded, brave and brainy youths like Madhusudan has Orissa been able to produce?

At that time there lived at Calcutta an educated Oriya who wanted to exhibit his Oriyaness by using two names i.e. Srikrishna Mohapatra but the names could never remain together as people joined them with two other names i.e. Srikrishna Udie and Inspector Mohapatra. The duality in his behavior that was discovered later when he returned to Orissa and joined the police force may be ascribed to such double identity. Srikrishna Mahapatra could prove his worth in his service

career and became a well-known name in Orissa. He had inflicted inhuman torture upon the patriots and innocent party workers during the non-cooperation movement. Perhaps his sense of duty forced him to do that. He had once deliberately pushed even me into trouble. "I cannot find any proof against you from the investigation. But order has come from above to implicate you in this matter," he confessed before me with his tear-filled eyes. As an individual he had been very kind to me as far as that particular incident was concerned. But at the same time people accused him of being a ruthless torturer and pilloried him as an inhuman police officer.

During the period of the Bengali nationalism movement, Srikrishna Mohapatra, who worked as a police inspector at Calcutta, had committed some nuisance which had made him quite unpopular. The untimely death of his elder son was supposed to be an act of suicide and was considered as the penance for the wrongdoings of his father. But the man had done something good for Calcutta. I had heard from him that there were a number of secret hang-outs at several places of the city those days which were used as clandestine meeting places by men and women of poor morals. They were called 'empty houses' in English. It was heard that sometimes the husbands or the wives come face-to-face with their own spouses quite unexpectedly at those hang-outs. Everyone realized that the presence of such rendezvous was a disgrace to the city of Calcutta. But it was Srikrishna Mahapatra who raised arms against it. I had seen him working tirelessly to put such unholy spots out of existence. Perhaps no such secret hang-out now exists in Calcutta. In their place now stand the luxury villas of millionaires who had come from Barrackpur and had settled in the city. The local name for such villas was *Baganbadi* (garden house). These villas probably were not considered as a social disgrace. Large cities have

as much notoriety as the reputation they have.

However we were not directly linked to those problems. Our major concern was to uplift the spirit of the Oriyas that lay dormant. *Kulabriddha* Madhubabu, by forming the *Utkal Sammilani,* had invented a red cap for the Oriyas that gave them a distinctive identity. A length of red cloth measuring about a foot or so hung from the back side of that cap. We started roaming about the streets wearing those caps. We went to college wearing them and attended meetings. At first, people thought of us as the members of some opera group but within a short time they could understand the background of the cap. The Oriya brothers who worked as labourers there began to talk with us in Oriya. People of Calcutta soon realised that the status of the Oriyas was no more confined to the level of cooks or domestic-helps.

An important event which occurred about the same time helped to enhance the prestige of the Oriyas in Bengal. Bihar and Orissa got separated from Bengal and together formed an independent state. After Bihar-Orissa independent state was officially formed, a joint-conference (coordination committee meeting) of the students of Bihar-Orissa was convened on the auspicious occasion of *Janmasthami.* The meeting was presided over by a Judge of the Calcutta High Court. He was Judge Hassan, a man from Bihar. It was during those days that the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj had just returned from a world tour. We Oriya boys organized a meeting to felicitate him. Madhubabu presided over that meeting. A number of impo-rtant men of Bengal with whom we have been maintaining cordial relationship attended the meeting. The speakers spoke in Oriya. To speak in Oriya on such a platform and that too in Calcutta was an experience which I had never had before. Those who, till then, had remained under the impression that the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj was a Bengali, must have been

disillusioned on that day.

House No. 9 was the centre of all these activities. Certain measures that were taken up to bring about social reforms in Orissa had been thought out and planned in that very house. We had once decided to abolish the caste system. It was resolved that steps would be taken to demolish the evils of caste system. The disparity among the people of different castes should be eliminated not just by eating together but also by instituting marriages of men and women of dissimilar castes. An organization called *Hindu Samaj* was formed to execute the plans. All the Oriya students, however, did not join the organization. But those who joined did so with a lot of enthusiasm. I had never shaved my beard and moustache until then. So did Neelakantha Babu. To shave one's moustache and beard was forbidden in the Brahmin society of Orissa. As a show of protest against it we both shaved our beard. However, we did not shave our moustaches. Later, Neelakantha babu had to face social persecution on account of that protest. His article *Mo Nisha* (My Moustache) had sent a stir through the otherwise undisturbed and orthodox Brahmin society. But after sometime he grew his beard. In Orissa, some refer him as *dadhi* instead of calling him by his name. "Can we get rid of these all devouring ones unless the 'beard' and the 'moustache' join hands once again?" People used to say this well into 1940s.

It was not so that just the two of us. Neelakantha babu and I, became the members of the "Hindu Samaj" and fulfilled our duties by shaving our moustaches and beard, but there were many others whom I cannot recall by name. But I remember Bichitrananda Das, Neelambar Mohanty, Bipin Bihari Roy, Chintamani Samantaray and Sashi Bhushan Chatterjee joining the organization. Neelambar Mohanty and Sashi Bhushan Chatterjee have already left this mortal world. When this article comes to the notice of those who are still

alive, they would perhaps say a little doubtfully, "It might have been." The rules and regulations of "Hindu Samaj" were printed. Those may now be lying buried under the heap of trash papers in the homes of some members. We were yet to attain the age to put in action the plans and principles the Hindu Samaj had laid down relating to marriage between persons of dissimilar castes. Hence, we started ignoring the caste discriminations by eating together and touching one another while taking food. We even ate from one another's plates. While at Cuttack, the tender-hearted poet Padmacharan was greatly impressed by one of my poems and invited me to eat with him, but I had refused him at that time. When, after the Hindu Samaj was formed, he saw me eating out of the plate of Neelambar Mohanty who was darker in complexion, he was extremely glad. At that time he had not become a boarder of the hostel at the House No-9. After having failed in the B.A. examination, he pursued his studies staying at some other place in Calcutta. He came to the House No. 9 after about a year. By that time, however, caste discrimination in matters of taking food was almost non-existent. But we had become more concerned and cautious about health-related factors than caste differences in such things.

Ardhasatabdira Odisha O Tahinre Mo Sthana
Cuttack, Granthamandir, 1996

Student Life in Kolkata
Gobinda Chandra Mishra

Translated by Prasant K. Purohit

Hence, I had to leave Shantiniketan and come to Kolkata. In Kolkata, I met distinguished people like Babu Surendranath Bannerjee, Motilal Ghosh and Ramananda Chatterjee. I gave them a detailed report on the development at Dasapalla and consulted with them regarding a possible solution to the problem. One or two leading articles about the Dasapalla uprising were published earlier in Surendranath Bannerjee's daily *The Bengali*. It is here that I had the opportunity to meet Babu Shyamsundar Chakravorty. He had shown a great deal of understanding and sympathy towards me. He was very eager about anything and everything that could be done for the people of Dasapalla. Had it not been the time of war, he considered, something or other could have been done with the help of the government. The political agitation during those days had not intensified to the extent as it has at present. The government used to pay at least some heed to the words of leader-like people. However, the German war proved to be a disaster for Dasapalla.

A stringent act called 'The Defense of India act' had been enforced due to the war. It was impossible to move against the government at such a critical time.

Despite the contemporary situation, Babu Motilal Ghosh, the editor of the journal, *The Amrita Bazaar*, advised me to write an open letter to the Viceroy through the journal reporting the development of the Dasapalla incident. He gave assurance that he

would publish articles on Dasapalla after receiving such a letter. He also offered to help create a general public opinion in favor of the people of Dasapalla criticizing the government action.

The proposal of Babu Motilal Ghosh kindled in my heart hopes that had already become dim. Presently, I had been residing at Number Three Mirjapur Street in Kolkata. This is the birthplace of the *Kumila Abhaya Ashram* of the Bengal province. Dr. Suresh Chandra Bannerjee had been collecting students and organizing them into a team for the service of the nation. Sureshbabu had been to Cuttack at the time I decided to flee the city to Kolkata. He had written a letter of request to his teammate, Mr. Jogendranath Shah, who had been residing in that mess. He had urged him to help me. I continued to stay there at Kolkata with his support. Subhas Chandra Bose, after shifting from Cuttack to Kolkata for studies, called on Sureshbabu regularly. In a sense, he had joined the team. He would daily come to this mess situated at Number Three Mirjapur Street. I became very intimate with him. Hence, those days I informed them in advance about things that I intended to do. I could do nothing without seeking their advice because I had no idea of the national political affairs. In such circumstances, I consulted Subhasbabu and Jogenbabu about the proposal given by Babu Motilal Ghosh. Sureshbabu was not in the mess at the time. All the responsibilities of the mess were on the shoulders of Jogenbabu. Hence, it was imperative on my part to seek his advice.

The court cases on the Dasapalla uprising had already ended. The poor Mr. Vaishnava Deo had been punished with deportation. Many persons had been sentenced to death by hanging. The poor Hadibandhu had been served with a sentence of imprisonment for fourteen long years. The final curtain on the Dasapalla act had fallen. I had already heard about everything. Subhasbabu and others also had learnt about everything. They opined that there would be

no gain in trying to conduct and operate an agitation in the manner suggested by Motilalbabu. They made serious deliberation on the matter and advised me not to execute the proposal given by Babu Motilal Ghosh. The essence of what they said was that the government would not listen to such matters during a time of war. The possibility of creating a strong public opinion against the government was a myth. Whatever happened at Dasapalla had been destined to happen. I had endangered my life by getting myself involved in the affair. My life would be further endangered if I began writing columns in the newspapers. The police at Cuttack would come to know about my habitation there. The police of Kolkata too would not let me stay at Kolkata. No one would be able to help me openly while a stringent act like the defense of India act was in vogue. My life would thus be wasted in vain if I wrote an open letter to the viceroy. Hence, it was better to forget the Dasapalla episode. Rather I was to prepare myself for the service of the nation so that they would come to my assistance by giving me a place to stay in their mess.

I listened to the advice given by Subhasbabu and others. When I consulted Mr. Shyamsundar Chakravorty and Babu Ramananda Chatterjee, they too advised me alike. Hence, I had to shrink from implementing Motilal Ghosh's proposal of bringing about an agitation through the newspaper by writing an open letter to the viceroy but I found no peace of mind. My mind was agitated and depressed with such thoughts as, "How helpless are we? How weak is our nation? We have no means of preventing injustice or oppression." My heart echoed the words, "Until we drive these white people out of India, there is very little chance of even thinking of doing any good to our country." I still remember the circumstances that had provoked such thoughts in my mind. Those words still reverberate in my heart. That situation dances in front

of my eyes. My heart sinks when I recollect them. As clear as daylight, I realize our helplessness and the misfortune that our country had been subjected to.

My life as a revolutionary

I returned to Shantiniketan at Bolepur in a state of depression finding no means to help alleviate the misery of Dasapalla despite all my efforts. I was unable to decide upon the course of action I should undertake or the path I should follow then. All the suggestions given by others appeared to flow out of my brain. At times, I felt irritated on uttering the name of God. I thought that concepts like truth, justice and God had no meaning. God does not exist. It is a sign of weakness to give oneself solace by talking of truth and justice. The saying – Might is right – is perhaps true. Where there is might, there is truth, justice and God. Many such thoughts occurred and made the mind restive. I spent sleepless nights. Scenes of the Dasapalla incident came as nightmares jolting me to wakefulness, night after night. The tragic scene of Dasapalla always danced in front of my eyes. I was in a fix regarding what to do and where to go.

Mr. Andrews had been to Kolkata. Shantiniketan had closed due to summer vacation. Most of the students left for their homes. Only few were present. Mr. Andrews returned from Kolkata but was taken ill with cholera. His life was at stake. I felt impatient in my present circumstances, observing the fatal state of health of Mr. Andrews. Caring little for my own safety, I engaged myself in the service and treatment of Mr. Andrews. With God's grace, Mr. Andrews survived. He left Shantiniketan for a health resort for the recovery of his health. I stayed on at Shantiniketan.

I could not decide upon what to do – whether to stay back at Shantiniketan or to proceed to Kolkata. In order to begin studies at

Shantiniketan I was required to have a certificate of my former school. I had studied at the Mission School at Cuttack. It was not possible to bring a certificate from that place. An arrest warrant had been issued against my name in Orissa. Babu Damodara Ratha and others were searching for me in the nooks and crannies of Orissa in order to capture me. They believed that I had hidden myself somewhere inside Orissa. They had not even imagined that I could have escaped to the Bengal province. Under such circumstances, it was impossible to bring a certificate from Mission School. Hence, I could see no possibility of continuing my studies at Shantiniketan.

I left Shantiniketan and was back to Kolkata. The plan of taking admission in a school and continuing my studies was postponed for the time. There is no such relation between pursuing studies in a school or a college and engaging oneself in service to the nation. It is enough if one acquires some basic knowledge privately. I was thus advised by Subhasbabu and others. I stayed at the mess at Mirjapur Street. I got the opportunity to read a few good books during that period. I read books on economy, history, and politics of the nation. I also went through a few books on religion.

The mess I stayed in had a unique history of its own. Some students resided in the mess but several others who stayed outside too used to visit the place almost daily. The purpose of such an arrangement was to form an organization of chosen students picked from the students' community for dedicated national service. The initiator of this plan was Dr. Suresh Chandra Bandopadhyay. Suresh Babu was fondly addressed as 'Sureshda'. 'Dada' is an address made to an elder brother in Bangla. In our mess, anyone who was elder of the two was addressed as 'Dada' by the other. They looked upon one another in a friendly manner. Sureshda, after completing his MBBS, had been pursuing the study of Hindu philosophy at

Kashi. The charge of the mess was upon Mr. Jogendranath Shah. All addressed him as 'Jogenda'. Jogen da was a very kind-hearted person. He had been studying B.A. at the time I arrived there. Jogen da was capable of capturing the heart of the students. Subhasbabu and Pramathbabu used to come and stay in the mess for long periods. Subhasbabu was in his first year I.A. in college. Pramathbabu was his classmate. Subhasbabu had attained second position in Matriculation in the Kolkata university. Pramathbabu had attained the first position the same year. The mess became famous and popular among the students as these two celebrity students of the Calcutta University were its regular visitors.

Presently, the mess existed in independent quarters at the Wellington Street after being shifted from the Mirjapur Street. All who resided there stayed like equals. Each one voluntarily paid to Jogenda the expenses incurred on his behalf. No special provisions had been made for the ones who received extra money from their households. Even the clothes worn by the inmates did not belong to anyone in particular. The washed clothes brought by the washer man were shared by all without any distinction with regard to which clothes belonged to whom. Everyone chose from the lot the clothes that fitted his shape and size.

There was a library in the mess. A meeting was held there every week. Students from outside participated in the meetings. Discussions were made on politics, religion and economy of the nation. Once or twice every month all the student members of the organization, the inmates as well as the outsiders, took meals together in the mess. That could be termed as a 'feast' on such days. Many students earned money through tuition in order to arrange funds to meet the mess expenses. Such is the brief history of the mess that became the foundation for the birth of the famous *Kumila Abhaya Ashram* of the Bengal province.

I stayed there for about one and a half years. I learnt a number of things there. It can be said to be a time of 'sadhana' for me. I ate only once a day. I went to bed at eight in the evening. I slept no more once I got up at night. On certain days, it so happened that I went to bed at eight in the evening and got up at nine or ten. Even then, I slept no more that night. I sat alone the whole night. I spent a little time reading. Deep at nights, I sat in meditation and prayer. I proceeded to the river Ganga for bathing every night at three. Everyone was fast asleep at that time. I returned to my room after taking bath in the river Ganga. On observing my activities, Jogenda had given me a name – Dr. Gavin. Many residents of the Abhaya Ashrama still know me by that name. They looked upon me as a worker of the Abhaya Ashrama.

Staying at Kolkata I could learn many things. I got realization regarding service to the nation and political life. One could know about the political discussions taking place in any corner of India if one stayed at Kolkata. Kolkata was the pulse of the political life of India. The state of health of a person can be known by testing his pulse. Similarly, one could know about all the political agitations taking place in India by residing at Kolkata and leading a political life. I could understand the causes of political conflicts in India, the rationale behind the creation of several political parties and their aims and objectives. Along with this understanding there grew gradually in me knowledge and experience regarding the nation and the political circumstances. I could understand my nation better. Until then, the Congress had not brought about any agitation demanding autonomy. There were no speeches against the government in public gatherings as at present. Uttering words like 'autonomy' and 'independence' was considered a sign of offence against the imperial authority. The Congress had already declared that what India demanded was colonial autonomy, but had not

started any agitation for achieving the same. I had listened to the readings of one or two articles by politicians, written on the subject of self-governance.

Residing at Kolkata my knowledge and experience of the political conditions prevailing in the country broadened but I could not forget the Dasapalla episode. My heart got inflamed with vengeance the moment the recollections of the Dasapalla episode occurred. The thought of vengeance was intensified with the increase of political knowledge and experience. A feeling arose in my heart that those who were responsible for the tragedy of the people of Dasapalla should not go scot-free. Thoughts of this kind created joy in my mind. I had not heard of the term 'non-violence' until then. I had not even dreamt of the country becoming free through non-violent means. I strongly believed that it was impossible to terminate the foreign rule over the country without adopting any violent means. Then, at Kolkata, political robbery and murders were perpetrated at times. A revolutionary party existed that did robbery for the sake of the country. The persons and police personnel who opposed them were being liquidated on opportune occasions. The news of such political robbery and assassinations were published in the dailies. There was more circulation of the newspaper on the days this news was published. Whenever I came across such news, I felt greatly aroused. I thought that there was no harm in killing the oppressors of the Dasapalla incident. But again, I thought that there was no gain in killing them. These people were not the enemies of the freedom movement. Our aim and aspiration behind all our actions and thoughts ought to be to free the nation. Moreover, if an action is motivated by personal considerations that would go against the political thinking of the nation. All actions and thoughts ought to be conducted in an organized and united manner.

I developed an eagerness to join the Revolutionary party of the

Bengal province as soon as such thoughts entered my mind. Just during this period, I came across the news, '*The Balasore Battle*', in the daily. There was a leading person by the name of Jatindra Nath Mukherjee in the Revolutionary party of the Bengal province. He had entered Orissa along with three to four of his comrades. He had left the Bengal province for Orissa as there were several arrests made in Calcutta with the enforcement of the Defense act of India. While he was loitering around in the district of Balasore, the vigilance police smelled his presence and the armed police surrounded him to capture him. Jatindra Nath Mukherjee fought with the police force of the government and was shot dead but he did not surrender. This fight with the police for three to four hours was termed as *The Balasore Battle* by the newspapers and published under that heading. On reading the news reports, I was as much elated as I was depressed. I was elated due to their courage and was sad due to their deaths. I still believe that it would not have been possible to capture them so easily had there been a single Oriya in their team. Beginning with that episode and from that point of time, my mind rushed to a decision to join the Revolutionary party.

A few members of the Revolutionary party had knowledge about the Dasapalla conflict. Some of them desired to go and help the tribal Kondhs of that locality after the news regarding the Dasapalla uprising was published in the newspapers. But none of them was able to do so due to different reasons and that was wise too. A few had heard my name in relation to that incident. They had also learnt that I had escaped into the Bengal province and had taken shelter in Shantiniketan at Bolpur. While I was at Shantiniketan, someone from the Revolutionary party had approached and talked to me. I had guessed and come to know about that later on. Some of the members of the Revolutionary party had an avid intention to absorb a few Oriya youths into the folds of their party.

There were several Oriyas in Calcutta. The police did not keep a close watch on them. It was known that a few Oriya youths absorbed into the party could be very useful and a number of activities could be smoothly performed with their help. With such an intention, some had desired to make me a member of their party. This too I learnt later. It is not easy to work for a Revolutionary party unless one has deep devotion for the nation and a preparedness to lay down one's life for the national cause. Few persons came to know me after I stayed at Kolkata. If they desired to identify someone, they applied skills about which God himself was unable to know. Anyway, I had a desire to join the Revolutionary party and they had a wish to make me a member of their party. But an opportune moment had not yet come to know each other's mind.

While I was in this mess, someone had come and asked me, "Who can make India independent?" I had mentioned the names of Gandhi and Aurobindo in my reply. I had not understood the significance of this question at the time it was asked. I did not know the person who had put the question. I learnt later that the person was a principal revolutionary. At Kolkata, it appeared impossible to know the actual identity of a person. The one you had considered your bosom friend might have been a revolutionary or a spy of the British police. How could one recognize the other in a situation like this?

It is for this reason that those who, desiring the nation's independence, enrol themselves as members of the Revolutionary party, are different inside. They have to do the opposite of what they feel in their hearts. In order to stay away from human observation they have to act in a way that has no harmony with their inner thoughts. Thus, it is not possible to know a man by merely observing his activities.

I visited Gadamatha every day. It was a big field. The river

Ganga was on one side of it. On the other side, there was the Chowringhee Lane. Fort William was on a field by the beach of the river Ganga. To one side of the fort there was Eden Garden. The palace of the viceroy was adjacent to the garden. Entry of any Indian in the garden was prohibited as long as Kolkata was the capital of India. Anyway, a number of stone images had been founded inside the field. Their names and identities had been written on their bodies. They were all the images of the British generals and the rulers. These people had helped establish the British Empire in India leading to the loss of her independence. The British government had founded their images in order to keep up their glory. These images aroused in one's heart thoughts regarding how India was bound and oppressed. Sleep evaded me the day I visited that field.

Besides, there was a tall and huge building inside that field. Its name is Monument. One evening, I went and sat by the side of that Monument. A person known by face came and stood by me at a particular time. I had no closeness with him. He sat by my side, put his hands on my shoulder, and said, "Why are you so weak?" After listening to the query, I had no doubts. I said, "Who says that I am weak? Strength of body is not the only sign of strength. It is enough if one has the strength of mind."

That was the first address. Then, he said, "If you wish to stay in Calcutta, you have to get yourself admitted into any school. Otherwise, you will attract the attention of the police by staying at Calcutta, loitering about here and there for nothing. The police will get suspicious. Nothing can be done if the police become vigilant. It is imperative on your part to get admission into a school by any means. Let me go. We shall meet again." That person left the place with those words.

He was a person known to me only by face. I didn't know exactly who he was, what he did and where he stayed. I only guessed

that he might have been a student. I continued to sit there long after he left the place. Many thoughts invaded my mind. I thought about how I would be able to listen to certain novel ideas. But I could not fathom the mystery of the above mentioned incident. After a few days, I realized that getting me an admission in a school was the job. After ensuring the completion of the job, I could think of other matters. I was indirectly given the command to complete the job soon.

There is absolutely no doubt that our mess had some specialty among the several messes in Calcutta. It is not that the police didn't have an eye on it. Jogenda and others were apprehensive that the mess would be shut down if the suspicious eyes of the police were cast upon it. In Calcutta, the police had a vigilant eye upon every Bengali student. If anything out of the ordinary was marked, the police spy kept track of him. Hence, there was a constant fear that I might be caught because I was staying in the mess without being enrolled in any school or college. Jogenda and others also decided that I should be admitted into any school for greater safety. But how could I take admission in any school unless my transfer certificate was brought from Cuttack? A certificate had to be arranged by any means.

A village called Baganan was situated thirty miles away from Calcutta. One could reach that village by Bengal-Nagpur railway. There is a high school in that village. Some friends of mine once wrote a letter to the headmaster of that school. I arrived at the Baganan School with the letter. On the advice of the headmaster, I wrote a letter putting the pseudo signature of my uncle. In the letter it was written:

Headmaster sir,

I have kept my nephew, Mr. Govinda Chandra Mishra, with me at Kolkata and have educated him privately. It is my wish to get him admitted into a school.

So I am sending him to you. I can't afford to keep and educate him at Calcutta. Therefore, if you become kind enough to test him and put him into a class, I shall remain ever grateful.

Yours faithfully,
Biswanath Mishra.

I wrote the letter in Oriya, then translated it into English and handed it over to the headmaster. He got me enrolled as a student of the first year of Matriculation. I returned to Calcutta. After a few days, I again went to the same school. My '*uncle*' had written another letter to the headmaster:

Headmaster sir,

You most kindly have Mr. Govinda, my nephew enrolled in the first year of school. I thank you heartily for that. But, in the mean time, certain developments have taken place because of which I feel compelled to keep him with me.

If you can kindly give me a transfer certificate, I shall be greatly benefited.

Yours faithfully,
Biswanath Mishra

I gave an English rendering of the application in Oriya to the headmaster of the school. He gave me a certificate on receiving the application. I returned to Calcutta with the certificate. It is not true that none of the other assistant teachers of Baganan School had objected to my getting a school leaving certificate soon after taking admission into it. But the headmaster paid no heed to their objection. Everything happened in accordance with his advice. He was a revolutionary. But, I hadn't known him until then. A few months after my acquaintance with him he was captured under the Defense of India act and deported to an island. I could surmise, from such development, that he was a revolutionary.

The certificate was thus acquired. There is no need of mentioning the rest of the mystery that lay hidden. There was a need to register my name in the admission record of a school. There was a school

by the name Khelatchand Institute at the Badabazaar Street of Calcutta. A few persons had set up that school on a commercial basis. I came to know from my experience in that school that setting up schools and colleges could be made into a business venture. Much income could be generated through the fees collected from the students if a school could be set up at Calcutta. The school founded by two or three persons used to engage other teachers who behaved like their paid servants. They were not given their salaries regularly. So, every teacher kept a few favourite students under them. During the collection of fees, a teacher collected fees from his favorite ones and kept that with him as his salary. The poor headmaster collected money from me many times. One day while I was going to deposit my fees, the headmaster said to me, "Govinda, give me the fees. I shall take the money and declare that you have given the fees. Those rascals haven't yet paid me my salary." Thus, the teachers often took away money from the students. One can imagine what the condition of the school was. I had to take admission in a nasty school like that. My aim was not to study in a school but to get the identity of a school student. I also had the fear that if I tried to get admission in a famous school instead of in this one with the help of the transfer certificate, I might be put to troubles as questions might be raised regarding the veracity of the transfer certificate. However, I was enrolled as a school student at last.

That year the students of the Presidency College had a tussle with a lecturer, Mr. Otten, of that college. Mr. Otten was beaten by the students. Subhasbabu, suspected to have a hand in the affair, was rusticated from the college for two years. He left Kolkata for Cuttack. Our mess came under the strict vigilance of the police. Several search operations were conducted on the mess. Consequently, the mess broke up. The inmates of the mess got scattered and took to different resorts. I went to Shantiniketan in Bolpur for a few

days. Before proceeding to Shantiniketan, I had appeared for the test examination. I was selected to appear for the Matriculation examination under the University. I attended classes in the company of those who were to sit for the Matriculation examination that year from Shantiniketan. I stayed with them as well. The students and the teachers, all, loved me a great deal. Shantiniketan was always open to me due to the kindness and generosity of Rabindranath Tagore.

The time came to sit for the examination. The students of Shantiniketan, collecting donations from among themselves, bore the expenses of my travel to Calcutta to appear for the examination. I passed the matriculation exam in second division. It was time then to get my name enrolled in a college.

Jatiya Jibanara Atmabikash
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Congress Work in Kolkata
Alekh Chandra Das

Translated by Sangram Jena

In the first of week of September 1921, I along with Narasingha Sarangi and Gopabandhu Das left for Calcutta. We got down from the express train at Howrah station. At the time Rama the servant of Gopabandhu Das did not accompany him. So we had to assist him in some ways. He took his bath on the ghats of Hoogly and offered his daily prayer. Lumps of scum floated in the river. He finished his routine work pushing those aside in the stream. Looking at those floating scum, I screamed. It's disgusting. He glared at me. But I did not take my bath there.

I had not visited Calcutta before. Next morning I visited Burrabazar and observed the business in the godowns of clothes and thread and in the store houses of British textiles. Particularly, I found a shop run by the eldest son of Mahatma Gandhi where British clothes were sold. Many disturbing thoughts came to mind. When he was relaxing that night I asked Gopabandhu, "Here, there is such a huge business of British clothes. How can this be stopped within a year? Ghandhiji has said 'unless the business is stopped, we cannot get Swarajya." "You need not understand that. You should work as ordered." Gopabandhu replied. To ask him was like asking a traitor, I thought.

You needed to know both Hindi and Bengali if you had to live in Calcutta. Educated people spoke in English. I could understand all these three languages but could not speak them. Many old books

were now sold on the footpaths of Calcutta. I purchased some English plays of Shakespeare and the President's address at Nagpur and read them happily during my leisure. There was no need to purchase Bengali books. I was able to speak Bengali jolly well after four days of practice.

Banu Banu, Balamukushna Bubu and Jagannath Dhir from Dhenkanal, all Oriya students of the medical college, stayed at the Gopal Mallick Lane in Calcutta. There was no medical school at Cuttack. Also there was no post-graduate department in Ravenshaw College. A few Oriya students were quite prominent in Calcutta inspite of the Bengalis' attitude of contempt towards Oriyas. They also participated in political and social movements in Calcutta. So we enjoyed our stay at Calcutta. One day, I met Laxminarayan Sahu. He was unhappy on account of my involvement in politics at such a tender age. He and his colleagues in Bharat Sevak Samiti did not appreciate the movement launched by Gandhiji because they were convinced that there were several kinds of social discrimination in India. Moreover, people of India were not literate. Here they were not aware of freedom struggle. Involvement of illiterate people in the movement meant social indiscipline. So they thought that the education of people about their country should be first ensured. Gokhale, the founder of Bharat Sevak Samaj, had a bad name even in England. His demand for free and compulsory primary education is yet to be achieved in India.

Sahuji and I

Laxminarayan Sahu liked me for two reasons: one was my handwriting and the other was my sense of judgement. I also respected him for his profound knowledge. But I could not work with him because of his strict attitude. Once when I expressed my dissatisfaction, he told me, "Laxminarayan is as fiery and beautiful

as Himalayas. Even after losing everything, he is not like lord Brahma." My sorrow gave way to laughter. For some days, Laxminarayan Sahu stayed at Calcutta. We both used to go to the meetings together. I did my job and he his. We also used to discuss the future of the freedom movement. Once I reached my quarters at 12 'O' clock in the night from my Bada office college square. Laxminarayanbabu waited for me till my return. I explained to him the reasons for my delay and told him why I came alone. He advised me not to repeat it. "Now murder and robbery have increased in Calcutta. You are an innocent boy, the only child of your parents," he tried to explain. He waited for me when I was speaking or addressing a public meeting. Together we returned after our work was over and ate *papad* in the market whenever we felt hungry. I still remember those moments when I cried when an old man breathed his last on the footpath and Laxminarayanbabu consoled me patting on my shoulder.

The Mahatma

A meeting was organized in the Holiday Park at Calcutta. Mahatma Gandhi, Moulana Mohammed Ali, Saukat Ali, Desabandhu Chittaranjan, Shyam Chatterjee and others attended the meeting. Gopabandhu Das organized the meeting primarily to discuss the status of Oriya in Calcutta. The meeting resounded with the slogan 'Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai'. Many issues like Jalianawalabag massacre, treaty by Government of India, were raised and speeches filled with hatred against British traders were delivered. The stage was made of wooden planks. Few chairs were put on the stage for the leaders. When Gandhiji arrived there was a mad rush to touch his feet. At that time no public address system was available. It was difficult for a speaker to be audible to the entire gathering. People referred to the reputed monks as Mahatma and called their residences

ashrams. Such words were used only to reform public character and make Indians honest and dedicated but not for cheap popularity. Gandhiji's speech was very short. "You all listen to Gopabandhu," he said. He then asked Ali brothers to address the meeting. People were very eager to see Gandhi. Maulana Saukat Ali had a grand figure, healthy and tall. He wore a large overcoat. He addressed the meeting in Urdu. "When Mahatma Gandhi stands by my side, I think I can put him inside my coat's pocket. But when I look at his face, I get frightened. I feel how small I am before him. He is the Mahatma, the worshiper of truth and non-violence."

Millions of Indians followed Gandhi for his unshakable faith in non-violence. So, many tricks by the British Government in India to introduce division failed miserably. The Gita and The Ramayana, the ancient holy texts of India, were close to Gandhi. Gandhi read it every day. He acquired his inner strength from the moral principles of those texts for which he could become an ideal for the people of India. He first led this movement that aimed at defying the British rule and gave a call to the people to join the movement.

On the day following the meeting at Holiday Park, the Oriya labourers did not go for their duties. After four days of continuous absence, the employers stopped their wages. Some labuorers returned to Orissa. But since they had no other means of income, the labour contractors, after four to six days of strike, started pouring into our office to know the position. "Wait, have patience. Gopabandhu has gone to meet Gandhiji for a discussion on your problem. You cannot reap the fruit unless you endear the pain. You should try to find out an engagement in the trades other than with cloth and thread. "Have you not read the stories of Dhruba, Prahallad, Sita and Sabitri in the puranas? You have to bear your suffering like them," we replied. Gradually the number of visitors to the office swelled. Purnacharan Bose and others tried to mollify

the strikers who roamed inside the office or on the streets every day. Slowly the number went on increasing. Businessmen started discussing the modalities of a compromise. But the Government employees tried to break the negotiation by influencing the traders. In the meantime, meetings were regularly held on holidays.

During that time, meetings, at least twice daily, were held among the strikers to strengthen their unity and to keep their morale high. Whenever the businessmen tried to run the business with the help of the police, the opponents started picketing and demonstrations.

The police were forced to dispense them by lathi charge or firing.

My First Trip to Kolkata
Baishanb Pani

Translated by Jyotirmayee Mishra

I travelled to Calcutta after finishing my performance in Chengail. During my stay there, events like the competitive theatrical performance with Gopal Dash, getting the gift of gold watch with Jasmine flowers, many medals and an income of hundreds of rupees were memorable. My income from all this amounted to hundreds of rupees.

We purchased tickets at Chengail, boarded the train, travelled to Howrah and then went to Bowbazar of Calcutta. We stayed at 66, Hidaram Banerjee Lane. After a few days, Gopal Dash reached there with his troupe. I met Dash and requested him to let me perform with his troupe. He refused and said that we would perform together in future but not then. That would take time. But the Oriyas living in Calcutta were keen to watch a contest between Baishnab Pani and Gopal Dash.

In the meantime, a Muslim gentleman of Jhingarpur managed to bring the two troupes face to face at Raasmani Kothi, Jaan bazaar. He got Gopal Dash to perform first. On the second night, the manager brought us to the Kothi with our musical instruments. At that time, performers of Gopal Dash's troupe were getting ready for their performance and Dash was relaxing on a cushion at the doorway, having pillows on either side of him. I along with my troupe arrived.

As we arrived, I went up to Dash to pay my respect to him.

While I was touching his feet, he asked me, "Who are you?" I introduced myself as Baishnab. He collected all information about our arrival in Calcutta. I told him that Manager Hanif had cleverly brought us together. Again, politely, I told him "Respected Nana! These boys can never be your equal. They will just give you an hour's break at intervals. We have come to a distant place. We will return home after earning a little money. Why should you let this upset you? Please do not take it to your heart." However, he turned a deaf ear to me and told me that he had come prepared for a contest. As word spread that we two were locked in a contest, a huge crowd gathered at the venue. Even there was a dearth of space. Every night the ticket sales went up by rupees two hundred. After four nights' performance, on the fifth, Dash sang an eight table-song describing the beauty of a woman. He informed the audience that I would reply to his song by way of a nine table-song. At day break, I informed the audience that I would sing the nine table-song the following night. With all humility, I sought the presence of all. After the performance was over, people left for their homes. I had glanced through the Oriya almanac to find an auspicious moment and collected all that was requird for composing nine table-song, portraying the beauty of a woman. Then I practised the song. Gradually the night approached and the crowd assembled was incredibly large.

I performed a scene involving King Jajati and the two prostitutes. The scene was laid in the king's garden and I sang the nine table-song addressing them:

Nine times nine, in all my fame,
Oh lustful Darling! Why you ridicule me?
Nine times two eighteen minus two,
Hey you sweet sixteen,
I am waiting, let's make love.

Nine times three twenty-seven,
Angel-faced lady, come soon.
Nine times four thirty-six
A woman like you nowhere you can fix.
Nine times five forty-five,
Minus forty, again and again,
Aiming the arrows of passion towards my heart,
you demolish my pride.
Nine times six fifty-four, minus fifty-three,
I have nursed only one wish, to love you Honey,
Come what may.
Nine times seven sixty-three, minus fifty-three, I am
getting blind to all the ten directions,
And paths I see not, my doe-eyed damsel.
Nine times eight seventy-two,
O' gold-coloured beauty, I'll cross this vain world,
call me to your love-boat,
And make me sit there.
Nine times nine eighty-one, holding a
sword, your wine-like intoxicating beauty,
Do not stab me subtly by uttering bitter words.
Nine times ten ninety,
do not forsake this new love of yours,
this Brahmin named Baishnab, says "I am yours forever."

After enchanting the audience with this song, I explained its meaning to the audience and left it to Dash to reply with a ten-table song. But following night, Dash did not sing the ten-table song. A gold watch in a bouquet of Jasmine flowers was at stake. As Dash could not sing the ten table-song, more people voted for me.

A Muslim muscleman from Tendakuda Balubishi village took the gold watch from the flower bouquet and tied it on my left

hand. Instead of accepting the gift, I pointed to the boy who played the role of king and indicated that it be given to him. But the audience thought that I did not accept it because the watch was not up to the mark. On this presumption one of them rushed to the market and bought a crown and placed it on my head, making me sit on a chair. The place resounded with claps. We felt extremely delighted. However, Dash was deeply shocked. On that very morning I had an altercation with him. So the warmth we had felt for each other evaporated.

After this, there was another occasion where a contest was organized at Nandaghosh Badi of Baag Bazaar. I was present there where Dash performed on two nights. Our troupe alone performed for three nights but Dash did not agree to participate in the contest. He did not even come on to the stage. After a few days when it was rumoured that I would go back to Orissa, Dash decided to perform for three nights in Rani Rashmani Kothi. Meanwhile, I had received an advance for performing at Aragada. A few members of the audience informed Dash that Pani was performing at Aaragada and that he might come back to this place in a couple of days. On hearing this, Dash stopped after a night's performance. It was the end May and the blazing sun tormented us. As *Rajo* festival was approaching, the boys were very impatient to return home. So we returned to our village and got the news of Dash's return to Orissa. A few days later Dash passed away.

Atmakahani

Ramakrushna Pustakalay, Cuttack, 1955

Working in Calcutta as a Domestic Help
Pabitra Mohan Pradhan

Translated by Priyambada Pal

On the fourth day at 2 o' clock the lady of the house sent Phirangi to bring me along. It was 16th of December, 1943. My friend Gandu, Mukund and Parshuram gathered to see me off. It was decided that Gandu Sahu would take charge of the central office then. My belongings were few. I wrapped one pair of clean dhoti and Punjabi *kurta*, a pair of slippers and a few books in a cloth and then in a piece of paper and packed them carefully. I intended to wear them when meeting any Congress member if I ever got a chance. I had two more worn out clothes. I wore a half-shirt, a vest and a cotton towel – the vest and the towel were torn to shreds. My bedding included an old tattered blanket. My packing was done. I had thirty-two rupees with me. Time passed. At 5 in the evening I got ready to leave. Bidding farewell to everyone in an atmosphere heavy with enthusiasm, happiness and mourning, I followed Thakur Phirangi with the bundle on my head. Though Phiringi offered to carry my bundle, I declined it.

We reached the doctor babu's house at half past six. Everyone, there, was happy to see me for they thought that the mistress had appointed a servant at a salary of rupees six per month to work during her brother's wedding. The cook asked Phirangi to serve me a full meal. She also declared that we would board the Bombay Mail at 3 o' clock that very night and leave for Calcutta. Dinner was over. We went to bed at midnight.

The doctor babu held a high-salaried job – he earned nearly rupees five hundred a month. The mistress was his second wife. Her father's financial position was precarious. Hence, as an elder sister, who was financially well off, she was supposed to help in many ways in her brother's wedding. She, therefore, carried scores of things with her. It included bedding that could easily accommodate six people – which was tied with a 20-cubit long rope. It weighed almost ten maunds – there were two quilts in it, each having the capacity to accommodate four people, and eight small pillows. The mistress's belongings also included three to four varieties of pulses, not less than four seers of each, seven to eight seers of sugar and a thirty-two inch trunk full of tableware such as plates, both big and small, bowls, glasses and such other things. There was yet another small trunk crammed with all kinds of odds and ends. This way we travelled with three huge and heavy loads.

The clock struck three in the morning. "Thakur! Thakur!," the mistress called out. All of us were roused from sleep. The mistress ordered me to carry the bedding, the two trunks and other articles to the taxi. Thakur was not supposed to do a servant's work. So he could not help me in this. He helped only to place the bedding, weighing one and a half maunds, on my head. I was a weakling, weighing only one maund and seven seers. How could I carry such a heavy load?! I thought it was beyond my capacity to carry those pieces of luggage. But I thought better of it because if I failed to do so I would be considered an inefficient servant. If the mistress did not take me along with her for this very reason, all my hopes of making political contacts at Calcutta would be smashed to smithereens. So I thought, come what may, I will carry these. The moment I put these on my head, I heard a snapping sound in my neck. I swerved. It was Phirangi who helped me gain balance. I somehow managed to take the bedding to the taxi which stood

half a furlong away. Even the driver could not force the bedding into the taxi boot. Then I carried the other two trunks as well. My eyes brimmed with tears and I began to find it difficult to breathe. I felt as if my neck had broken. But the pain vanished as soon as the thought that I was doing all these for my country entered my mind. I did not have to carry the luggage after reaching the station, thanks to the coolies there.

The Bombay Mail arrived at the station at 4 a.m. We boarded the train. It was 10 in the morning when we reached Howrah Station. We hired three coaches to take us to Amar Bijay Ray's house on Mahakali Lane of Sukia Street in Central Calcutta.

Amar Bijay Ray was the mistress's elder cousin and had to be married off first. Samar Bijay Ray was her brother. His wedding was scheduled ten or fifteen days later. The day we reached their place, Amar Bijay Ray had gone to Comilla to get married. His house was crowded with relatives and guests. The luggage was brought down by the coachmen. The other cooks and I rolled the bedding and lifted the trunks up to the second floor. The mistress of the house was called Sarala Devi. She took me along and introduced the others to me. She told me whom I should address as 'Thakurma', 'Ma', 'Didi', 'Dada' etc and said that I should call her 'Saraladidi'. We finished our ablution. Sarala Didi fed us with a variety of good food and said, "Ram, whoever works in our house gets sumptuous meals."

There was not much work to be done that afternoon. But one would take almost four hours to finish the remaining chores. I therefore went out to make friends. I found a boy called Kanai from the milkmen's caste in a nearby house. An Oriya cook named Upendra Mishra from Balasore worked in his house on contract. Although Upendra Mishra was a cook, he carried himself with the air of a clerk who earned rupees fifty. I made friends with both of

them. I soon endeared myself to Upendra by addressing him as 'Nana'. My grandfather's name was Kanhai. Hence I addressed Kanai (Kanhai) as 'Aja' and won his heart as well.

I finished my day's chores and retired at midnight. Amarbabu's mother woke me up at 4 in the morning. The first thing I did after getting up was light six coal braziers. Finishing my ablution, I lifted almost twenty bucketfuls of water upstairs, climbing almost seventy steps. It was six by the time all these got over. Everyone finished their bed-tea by that time. I washed the cups clean. Quickly sweeping the house and the courtyard, I went out at 7 a.m. with a gentleman to the municipality market carrying a big rattan basket. The market was in the College Street area, about half a mile away. After shopping, I reached home by 8 o' clock, carrying articles weighing a maund or fifty seers on my head. Then I immediately got down to grinding turmeric and other spices to a paste without wasting any time. By this time, everyone finished their breakfast. I cleared the dishes and washed them clean. There were almost eighty people in the house who had come to attend the weddings. They all bathed in the bathroom. They dumped their discarded clothes in the bathroom and I had to wash them and hang them out to dry on the terrace. It took me almost two hours to wash, wring and dry the clothes which were no fewer than eighty in number. And when I came down, I found around sixty dishes and leaf plates to be cleared and washed. After finishing this, I had to clean the house again. All these were not over before 2 p.m. Then I took my bath and had my meal. I got good food but could not relish anything out of fatigue. I did not have much work from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. I brought the dry clothes down. Everyone collected their garments from me. But I had to fold almost thirty clothes and hand them over to their owners. I had to wash nearly five persons' outfits with detergent. There was no need to buy groceries in the afternoon.

Whenever the need was there, I went to the market at 6 o' clock.

At half past 5 in the evening, I had to sweep all the rooms, dust the beddings and keep them in their proper places, wash the tea cups and lift almost twelve buckets of water upstairs. Again I pasted seers of onion, turmeric, mustard seeds, cumin seeds, coriander seeds, garam masala and red chillies. The cook and I had our dinner at 11 p.m. after everyone else had finished eating. The cook left afterwards. I cleared the dishes, washed the kitchen and filled the braziers with coal for the next day. It was midnight by the time these got done. Then, washing myself well, I spread the tattered blanket on the veranda and fell asleep. On some days, Kanai pestered me to tell stories. Sleep overpowered me sometimes even as I was half way through a story. There was a maidservant to do the dishes. But she worked on contract and came only twice a day. Hence I had to do all the extra work owing to the wedding. Besides these, I had to shop at times. This was the amount of work I had to do at Amar Bijaybabu's house. He had made arrangements to stay in another house on Raja Dhirendranath Street in Maniktala after the marriage. He was my mistress's brother. I had to clean the new house, wipe the floor with water and move in the furniture and other articles which we had carried for them from the old house (from Tata Nagar) to the new.

This way I had to do three servants' work every day – a servant's, a washerman's, and a maidservant's.

A Row in the House

I had to work in our land during my childhood as our family was poor. But when you work for your home, you work according to your strength and willingness. I was used to physical labour all through minor school. But I did not have to exert myself while pursuing my B.A. and B.Ed. degree. No one at home allowed me

to work either. Teaching in the high school too did not require any physical labour. Since my association with the movement of 1937, I confronted many a hardship, pain and misery. I often ran away from home to participate in the movement of 1938. I have already narrated what hardships I had to put up with during 1942. In spite of all these it grew impossible for me to do the work of three servants with my frail body. Ten to fifteen days passed in this way. Then I became lazy. I did not respond immediately if anyone called out to me, ignored work and did not do anything wholeheartedly. Neither did I grind the spices carefully nor did I do the dishes properly. I was dying to have people complain and scold me so that I could retaliate. One day, the mistress and one of her brothers noticed my carelessness in the execution of some tasks and got extremely annoyed with me. Events took such a turn that they came forward to hit me with a broomstick. I also got ready to put up a fight. My bloodshot eyes intimidated the mistress and others present there. They all fled the place. Then around ten men and women sat down to sort out the problem. I said, "I won't be able to do so much work. I've come here as a servant, I'll do only a servant's work. I won't do the work supposed to be done by a maidservant or a washerman." When some of them argued that I had to do these, I shouted, "What will you do if I don't?" They answered that they would beat me and send me to jail. "If you dare touch me, I'll knock you down with heavy blows," I retorted. "The policemen are not your orderlies who will arrest someone and take him to court at your behest. Don't boast of your power before me," I said. They were all taken aback and said, "Sarala, what a servant you have brought! He is teaching us law!" Yet a few others sympathized, saying, "He really does a lot of work without a murmur. He reacted today only because he was going to be beaten." Then they all left the place one by one. I went and sat at a lonely corner of the veranda.

Feelings of anger, humiliation and revenge crowded my mind while I sat on the veranda. Tears streamed down my cheeks. I started reproaching my fate and God. A few came to take me in but did not dare say anything before my fury. The more I thought about the unfair treatment meted out to me, the angrier I became. I started to give in to my conscience. I was reminded that in order to get justice, King Nala had to cut grasses for horses, the Pandavs had to work as milkmen, groom, dance and teach music, cook, and live like Brahmins in the palace of King Virat. Draupadi had to serve as a maid in waiting. Lord Sri Krishna had to touch a donkey's feet to kill Jarasandha, an evil soul. Rana Pratap had to roam around his kingdom wearing nothing but a loincloth, sleep on ledges of rock and survive on fruits and roots for the welfare of his subjects. There was no end to the distress and humiliation Subhash Bose had to put up with to bring independence to India. But he is now separated from his motherland and is in some far-off unknown land. When Queen Draupadi served as a maid in waiting she was molested by Kichak every day. Judhisthir, the righteous one, was hit with the dice by King Virat and got injured in the nose. King Alfred, in spite of being the ruler of England, had to endure the beating of a blistering ladle by a cowgirl while he was in disguise. Compared to all these, the affront I withstood was quite insignificant. I thought if I had received a good beating of broomstick from my mistress, I would have come out successful in the test. But I was not lucky enough. Thinking this way, I regained my composure. I got up and cleared the dishes. Nobody dared say a word to me. But I made everyone happy again through my winning manners of speaking. From that day the amount of work given to me lessened a little. Nevertheless, there was plenty of work to do. But whenever I said that I had other work to do, they would stop trying to force me to run their errands.

I worked in an educated Bengali household. A fusion of the East and the West, modern and traditional ways of behaviour were observed in such families. This fusion was discernible in their food, drink, clothes, manner of speaking, social etiquette, religion and ethics. I found Bengali weddings to be much more modern than Oriya weddings. There was no chanting of cantos from the Vedas nor were there any *homas* or *yagnayas* performed as they were in Oriya weddings. But since the day I fell out with the mistress and others, everyone changed their opinion about me. They started to believe that I was not as stupid as they had thought me to be. Rather, I was a conscientious man. Hence they also asked for my opinion about the wedding at times. Whenever they did so, I cracked jokes and pulled their legs and they laughed. But what I saw on the bed of the newly-wed couple on the fourth night after the marriage would be considered vulgar in Oriya society. As there was not much space in the house, I had to sleep on the veranda near the door of the room where the newly wed couple slept. But they considered me naïve; otherwise why would someone work in Calcutta for a meager income of rupees six per month and slog like a donkey.

The master of the house and others, especially the women, often enquired whether I was married and if had children. I replied that I was not married. Every time they asked when I would get married, I said, "Nobody wishes to give their daughters in marriage to me for I am a pauper. On top of that I'm just a bag of bones." This made them roll with laughter. They further asked me, "Do you wish to get married?" "I don't earn much. How would I feed my family?" I answered. At this reply of mine, they called the old women in the house and burst into peals of laughter. Some of them teased me saying, "Come to our place, Faridpur district. You'll build a house for yourself there. We'll get you married." "I'll think about it," I said.

All the servants in the house thought me to be a simple person and trusted me. The maidservant, Kanai, and the cook sometimes told me about their sorrows. One evening the cook Kanai and I were sitting together. The newly married master had gone to the latrine, which was at a little distance, to relieve himself. Now Jagadamba, the maidservant, arrived there. No sooner had she come than the cook started scolding her for coming so late to do the dishes. She said to me, "Ram, the Thakur baba (cook) is a rich man. How can he understand our difficulty? But you are as poor as I am. You can understand my problem. Our masters revel when there is a wedding in the house, but this brings us so much trouble." I put in, "You are right Jagadamba. When they have fun we servants suffer great pains." Hearing this, the master, who was inside the latrine, burst into a guffaw. After coming out of the lavatory and cleaning himself, he called around ten men, sat down and said, "Ram, explain how weddings bring us pleasure but make your life worse than hell?" Jagadamba and Kanai had started to shiver. They hid themselves and stood there listening. I said without fear, "The bride has come into the house as Goddess Lakshmi and has brought the house wealth and riches. The whole family is overwhelmed with joy. The relatives are happy. They feast on a variety of sweets and cakes. The newly-wed couple is lost in marital bliss. But it is us, the servants, who have to work day in and day out during such events. We don't even get time to eat and sleep properly. For our part, we think that the world would have been a much better place if the concept of wedding were not invented." Everyone burst into laughter and said, "Ram is indeed very clever!" Someone said, "He is a Karan. The Kayastha caste in Orissa is clever like the Bengalis." Another one put in, "He is educated. When he goes shopping, he makes calculations so quickly. Even Dhiren, who is studying mathematics honours, can't equal him in this."

A wedding! The wave of joy and love had drenched every place in the house. There was love between the newly wed couple and verbal flirting between Kanai and Jagadamba. One cannot say if Upendra, the cook, did not also get carried away by this tide of love.

Attempts to contact Congressmen

I have already mentioned that I hardly got leisure of two hours a day from 3 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. Sometimes the mistress gave me some odd jobs at this time but I never listened to her. I utilized this leisure period searching for Congressmen. After lunch, I took out the clean clothes and the sandals from the bundle and silently walked out, tucking these under my arms. A durwan lived on the ground floor of that house. I changed into the clean clothes there and went out on my expedition leaving the old clothes in the durwan's house. I chose one area each day and searched the Congress office there. There was a public library nearby. I went there and read newspapers. I took down names and addresses of some institutions and nationalists from the newspapers and talked to those men who were clad in khaddar. But nothing bore fruit. I found names of some Forward Bloc members as well. I tried to get in touch with them but in vain. Some of them were not at home and some had gone outside Calcutta. I could not stay for more than one and a half hours anywhere. Hence I could never wait for anyone at his or her place. A month passed by in this way. At the same time, overwork and constant contact with water had started playing havoc with my health. I often suffered from cold and cough and was down with fever at times. I felt, if such conditions continued, I would die before being able to contact any Congressmen. I decided either to hasten my endeavours to make friends with Congressmen or to work in some other place where the workload would be less. I was adept at doing a servant's work.

I was fortunate to meet a member of the Forward Bloc. But he said, "First of all you are a stranger to us. Next, almost all members of our party are in jail now. The few remaining ones are under house arrest. Hence, the team is virtually broken. You go and meet some Congressmen through your identity card or through someone's reference." I tried to follow his advice but was unsuccessful because I did not have enough time.

One day I told Upendranath, the cook, "Nana, both of us are Oriyas. We are brothers. You can see how these people make me do the work of three servants and pay me only rupees six per month. At Tata Nagar they told me that I would have to work for only five people. But I have been washing clothes and doing dishes of seventy people every day for the last two months due to these three weddings. I won't do it any longer. I'll return home. You can understand my predicament. Can you look for a better job for me? I also know cooking." The cook said, "Ram, when I heard that you were coming from Tata Nagar to Calcutta to work for only rupees six, I thought you must be an imbecile. Nowadays, no one works as a domestic help for a salary of less than rupees ten. But you do not worry. I'll find you the job of a cook in some other place. Three gentlemen live in the house opposite to mine. They need a cook. But they don't want a Brahmin cook. You need to do very little work there. The masters will have their lunch at nine o' clock in the morning and come back at five thirty in the evening. Salary is twelve rupees per month. You cook up some excuse and leave your present job. You'll stay with me till you have a new job." His words filled me with hope. I started to think of excuses to leave the job. I stopped working, saying that I was not feeling well. The masters were getting increasingly annoyed with me. When they asked me the reason, I said, "I'm suffering from piles. I will not be able to continue working." They thought that I was giving a lame

excuse and sent for a doctor. I had read about hemorrhoids from various sources earlier. I listed the symptoms to the doctor. The doctor said that the symptoms I was narrating were indeed of piles but I was not suffering from it. Then everyone threatened that they would hand me over to the police. I retorted by giving them a long lecture about law and order. Hearing this, someone from their family asked me, "How do you know so much about the law?" "I used to work in a lawyer's house in Cuttack," I said. "We are Karans after all! Law is our pet subject. Having general knowledge about it is no big deal for us. In our state all men and women have this much knowledge. Unfortunately, here in your land, Bengal, even educated people don't know the basics of law. You threaten to send me to jail because I refused to work! Shame on your education!" They were all shocked into silence. Some of them said, "Good God! It seems he'll make us work for him." By this time my mistress, Sarala didi, had grown furious. She said, "If he wants to go, let him compensate for the loss and then leave." Others supported her saying, "He is a barrister. Who'll dare keep him as a servant? Send him away tomorrow morning." Sarala didi said to me, "I won't pay you last month's salary." I cut in saying, "I've a right to that salary. But I don't care if you don't pay me. Go and build mansions with a pauper's money. I'll leave tomorrow morning." Everyone fell silent. Next morning I packed my clothes, informed the master and left for Upendra Mishra's house.

What Upendra Mishra had been referring to as his humble abode for the last one month turned out to be the lower part of a miserable, wooden ledge built by a paan vendor called Nanda. Nanda did not have a house to live in. He had built this ledge near the gate of the market in Sukia Street to sell paan. He slept on it at night. Upendra Mishra slept under it. When I reached there I found Upendra Mishra sleeping in his tiny home, cooped up like a bird. I woke him up.

After getting up he said, "Our quarter has not been repaired yet. You keep your belongings here." He asked Nanda to accommodate me there. He agreed reluctantly. After the gate was closed that night, I had to rinse it clean of mud and waste and then go to sleep.

I was without work for about a week at that time. Hence I had plenty of time. I finished my ablutions in the morning and went out on my mission. I thought it was of no use searching other members of the Forward Bloc. I had decided to meet Congressmen instead. I had read in the newspaper that the leader of the Assembly Congress Party, Sri Kiran Shankar Ray, had been set free. I was determined to meet him. In case I did not find him, I would meet editors of some nationalist newspapers and magazines. I was hell bent on making contacts with some Congressmen by hook or by crook as I had some time. With this purpose in mind, I explored almost the whole of Calcutta on foot. Whenever I found anyone wearing khaddar, I asked them about Kiran Shankar Ray. I had asked almost a hundred men about him. Unfortunately, nobody could tell me about his whereabouts. Finally I went to the office of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. I wrote a chit to the editor, Sri Tushar Kanti Ghosh, expressing my wish to meet him. Unfortunately he had left for Allahabad. But I met his assistant. When he asked me why I had come, I said, "It would be better to tell Tushar babu. I'll come some other time." I also asked him about Kiran Shankar Ray's address. He could not tell me either. I asked several others in his office but no one knew. Then someone found out his address from the telephone directory and gave it to me. This brought me some consolation. I returned to my little dwelling. By that time I had already stayed at Nanda's place for four days.

The next morning I boarded a tram from Himani Market in Sukia Street and went to European Asylum Lane. Kiranbabu lived there in house number 44. He was a big zamindar. Many *gomasthas*

sat in his courtyard. I went to them first. All of them wore khaddar. They were well-behaved too. They asked me who I was, where I came from and who I was looking for. "I have come from Orissa to discuss something very important with Sri Kiran Ray. Please let me meet him," I said. When Kiranbabu was sent word about this he said, "If he has brought any letter of reference, let me see it first." I said, "No I don't have any such letters. I want to talk to him about something personal. I'm a political worker." When he learnt that I had come to discuss personal issues he avoided meeting me. He sent word that I should come at 7 p.m. I went there again at the scheduled time and again sent word to meet him. But he went out on some urgent work with four or five men accompanying him. I was told that he would return at about 11 o' clock at night. I came back. Next morning I went there again at 7 in the morning and said to the head *gomastha*, "Please let me meet Kiranbabu today." He felt sympathetic and made a request to Kiranbabu. A man brought word from Kiranbabu to me after some time and said, "You are but a stranger. How can you meet him?" I got irritated and said, "I have been telling you since yesterday that I'm a political worker and have come to discuss something personal. But he doesn't want to meet me. If you don't trust me, you frisk me and then let me meet him." Saying this I took out my salwar kurta. I was about to undo my dhoti when they stopped me. I further said, "Let me speak to him. It's up to him whether he wants to answer me or not. What keeps him from meeting me? We are soldiers of the Congress party. We deal with arms and ammunition, get hanged and embrace exile to bring freedom to our country. People like him have become leaders only because of workers like us. Still, he is so suspicious and reluctant to meet me! How will the country get independence if the leaders behave this way?" Kiranbabu overheard me. He immediately sent word to me that I should come to meet him at eight o' clock

next morning and talk to him at length. This gave me some relief. I returned to the hovel in which I was put up temporarily.

I was taken to the living room of Kiranbabu the moment I reached his place the next day. He offered me tea and asked me why I wanted to meet him. I told him everything about the incident of 1942 in Talcher and informed him about my intentions behind meeting him. I submitted a statement given by Maxwell sahib, a private member of Central government to him for his approval. But he said that he knew everything about the above incident. He had also heard about me, my absconding from jail and the rumour about my death. How would he then believe that I was Pabitra Mohan Pradhan? It was possible that the police had sent a spy disguised as Pabitra Mohan Pradhan to elicit secret information from him. Hence he said that he would not be able to help me unless he got a reference about me from some acquaintance of his, written or oral. Now I understood what had kept him from meeting me. I said, "Every single person in Orissa who knows both of us is in jail now. Where should I get a letter of reference from? I have no money with me and it is not safe for me to return to Orissa."

Hearing all this, Kiranbabu asked me some more questions about my visit. Later on, he said, "Ex-prime minister, Biswanath Das's brother, Biprababu has come to Calcutta. I'll talk to him about you. Give me eight days' time. I'll try my best to get you and your group members engaged somewhere." His words brought me some respite. The next day I returned to Tata Nagar to pass this good news on to my party members. Encouraging them to serve the motherland, I returned to Calcutta on the seventh day with a follower of mine.

Kiranbabu had talked to Bipra Charan Das about me. In spite of this he had not developed full faith in me. Nevertheless, he had started his endeavour to look for some work for us. The curator

of Calcutta Corporation Commercial Museum, Sri Gyananjan Niyogi also doubled as the chairman of Calcutta Relief Society. When he learnt about me, he agreed to engage me in relief work instead of making me serve as a political worker for his lack of confidence in me.

I went and met Kiranbabu on the eighth day early in the morning. He called up Gyananjan Niyogi in my presence and said, "I am sending the gentleman who has passed B. A. and B.T. to you now. You talk to him and make arrangements accordingly." The reply from the other end was, "Send him now." I met Gyanendrababu. He finished his office work hurriedly and drove me a fair distance. He stopped the car at a place and asked me about the Talcher incident and the purpose of my visit. He too said, "It would have been better if someone had introduced you formally. So I'll send you first to moffussil areas for medical relief work for the Relief Society." Thus, I started working there.

Assistant Manager at the Relief Centre

After some days, when the relief work stopped, I returned to Calcutta. Gyanababu got me engaged at Narikela Relief Centre this time. I worked as an assistant manager there. There were about one thousand people in the camp. They had been ravaged by the drought. Everyday hundreds of such people were brought to the camp in lorries from the roads of Calcutta. There was heavy work in the camp.

The 1943-44 war had led to a scarcity of food grains. This drought had, in fact, occurred because of the carelessness of the British Government and its league of ministers. About sixty lakh people in West Bengal died of starvation. People in large numbers had left their villages and taken refuge on the roadside of Calcutta in the hope of getting their hands on food. The relief centres and

medical mission centres had been opened to help these people. Managers of some renowned organizations funded these centres. Though Gyanababu had appointed me here on Kiranbabu's recommendation, neither of the two had developed trust in me yet. This was because I had not been introduced to them by any common acquaintance.

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With Satisbabu in Calcutta
Manamohan Choudhury

Translated by Mary Mohanty

After padayatra, father advised me to go and stay with Satisbabu. At that time, Satisbabu had already set up a tiny hospital for harijans at Sunda area, to the east of Calcutta and he himself learnt medicine through that. Father hinted that I would learn bacteriology if I stayed with him. He could also arrange laboratories for practical study of chemistry, physics etc. Then, I was not interested in bacteriology. Anyway, as I could not think of anything else, I agreed to that proposal with the hope that I would get an opportunity to discuss science with Satisbabu. Perhaps, father left me in Calcutta in August. Then they made Bari their headquarters.

Seated at College Square in Kolkata, father talked to me for a long time. A time comes in one's life when the course of life seems to change. At that time decision has to be taken after deep thought. Then there is no need to hurry or to be impatient. He narrated how he had spent two to three sleepless nights before leaving his salaried job and then he decided his course of action. He intended to lighten the burden of my anxiety. I only listened to him. I do not remember saying anything myself.

Sundapalli is located two and a half miles to the east of Sealdah. That area appeared more like the alleys of Cuttack than a place in Calcutta. There the hospital was set up in a five-roomed of single storey rented house. Some space was left around the house where a few coconut trees had grown. Five to six persons worked there. Sister Maya, sister Nirmala and two women workers stayed there

and taught lessons to the children of the nearby harijan locality. Another worker, brother Shyam, was capable of doing many things. Doctor Nabinchandra Nath, L.M.P., was in charge of the hospital. Sitikantha Jha was in charge of keeping records and accounts. Everybody called him 'Masterji'. He hailed from Mozaffurpur district in Bihar. After I arrived, a young man from Howrah named Gopal and an educated harijan young man named Jiten Talukdar also came and stayed there.

Satisbabu was a tremendously talented person, a scientist and an active and affectionate man. But he also possessed the qualities of an old-fashioned guardian. He wanted that everything of the organization would remain under his control. He nagged and found out what everyone was doing. In a way, he compelled all to follow his advice. One day, after the prayer session at dawn, he lectured about food and said that potato skin should be eaten as it contained many vitamins. Then he asked Masterji whether he ate potato skin or not. Masterji replied in the negative. So convincing were Satishbabu's arguments that he agreed to take them thereafter. I have already narrated our reaction after we visited Sodapur ashram in 1931. The atmosphere at Sunda also centered round a guardian. 'Baba has said this, said that. He has to be consulted on this matter. How can it be done if he does not approve of?' This did not suit me. I remained silent as it was my nature. But like a suppressed rebellion, I had an attitude of doing what I liked and this was informed in all my activities. For instance, all others except the doctor, including sister Maya and sister Nirmala were tonsured completely. But I did not do that. I did not follow others in calling Satisbabu 'Baba' and Hemaprava Devi 'Ma' and called them 'Kaka' (Uncle) and 'Kakima' (Auntie) instead. It was proper to call them 'Jyathamasai' and 'Jyathima' as they were quite senior to my parents. I rectified this mistake after a long time.

If I had to go anywhere in Calcutta, I did not take the permission of Satisbabu. I used to go to the residence of Abhaya Ashram at 170 Harrison Road, the Imperial Library and the photo studio at Dharmatala. There I continued the work of taking photographs as well. Two Oriya boys, Rabindramohan Das and Radhashyam Maharaj, stayed in Abhaya Ashram. A few days after I reached Calcutta, I became a member of the Imperial Library and commenced my studies by borrowing books.

One day I was blamed on account of this. An unpleasant situation occurred when I became a member of the Imperial Library. A recommendation was necessary to be a member of this library. I obtained a letter of recommendation from Satisbabu. The official at the library said that the degree of the person who recommended should be written. Satisbabu was more learned than any degree holder and was a renowned person. But it could not help. So I took the signature of doctor Nabinchandra. He wrote L.M.F. below it and my work was done. Satisbabu was surprised at this and expressed annoyance at the attitude of the official. Satisbabu was doing an experiment. So something was being boiled in a cooking pot on a kerosene stove. Satisbabu asked me to keep an eye on that and went out. I also left after some time. When I returned in the evening, I found that everything was damaged. Water had dried up in the cooking pot and everything in it was burnt. As the stove burnt intensely, everything was burnt and looked black. Satisbabu did not say what I suspected he would say. He regretted my irresponsibility mildly. He did not restrict my movements. I devoted my time to my studies and photography after performing my duties there. Despite that, I felt tension mounting in me because of the atmosphere prevailing there.

Amidst many experiments conducted by Satisbabu, one effort was made to provide the poor with medicine at a cheaper rate. So,

many types of country herbal medicines and allopathic tablets were prepared. Tablets from many materials like kuruchi, kalamegha, bael, papaya milk to quinine, soda biocarb etc. were prepared with the help of a hand-operated small machine. A few varieties of injections were prepared as well. The idea behind all this preparation was that there would be no need to weigh different elements of a medicine if tablets of particular weights were available, while giving medicine. These were prepared at a low cost. He collected information on how medicine companies took twenty-five to fifty times more profit than the cost of production and passed that information to us. At that time, one pound of quinine sulphate was sold at rupees two hundred and fifty. He made us understand that the foreign countries which produced quinine were united and fixed a higher rate acting unilaterally. He regretted that though the Bengal government produced quinine at Kaling Peak areas at a cost of rupees five to seven per pound, it sold that at a price stipulated by the foreign companies. The cheap remedies of Satisbabu became popular in ashrams in rural areas and were used there for many years.

There were four beds for patients. Only serious patients were admitted to those and we nursed them. My training as a compounder at Jharapada helped me a great deal here. However, the tablets which were prepared there were used here. I remember that a harijan young man who was afflicted by meningitis or cerebral malaria was admitted. We nursed him spending sleepless nights but he did not survive. We were shocked.

Gandhiji had advised Satisbabu to write a small book which could be used by workers and family men in rural areas in order to treat ordinary ailments. Here at Sunda, Satisbabu prepared himself to write that book. He was not a physician. He learnt medicine in order to write this book. He himself nursed and treated patients in

the hospital under the supervision of the doctor employed there. Reading medical books, consulting renowned doctors of Calcutta and taking their advice, he wrote the book. Instead of being a small book as Gandhiji wanted, it turned out to be a thousand-page to me. But it became a wonderful book. A book like *Home and Village Doctor* had basic, practical and deep knowledge about treatment of diseases. Starting from physical education to treating delivery patients, all types of cure which could be practiced by ordinary as well as intelligent persons.

Work and Study

After some days the idea of starting a cottage tannery crossed Satishbabu's mind. Instead of selling the hide of dead cattle to traders, he intended that the harijans of village would themselves tan those and get work. At first small wooden pots, goat skin and chemicals were brought and tested at Sunda. Amar Palit who hailed from Orissa and later became a Deputy Director in the Department of Industry in Orissa government, came and assisted in it. He had recently received training in tanning at an educational institute in Calcutta. Satisbabu instructed me to collect all the books on tanning from the Imperial Library. I brought only two to three books. Again he instructed me to watch and learn how work was done in small tanneries at No. 4 bridge area. I visited that area and came to know a Muslim young man named Rauf and studied whatever activity was possible in his small tannery.

The rumor spread among my friends' circle that my study continued seriously at the Imperial Library. Somebody had pointed out a couple of times that Lenin had prepared himself studying in the British museum. But my study was not so serious. I never read books on philosophy, politics and economics there. When I first entered the library, I was surprised on seeing uncountable reference

books on numberless subjects stacked in shelves which touched the roof. Which subject should I read, which one should I leave? I brought out a book and turned over its pages. I tried to have an idea about the subject. I went through the books of Wells, Russell, Shaw and other English writers that I could lay my hands on. I enjoyed the novels of Romain Rolland a lot as well. I brought the books on my favourite subjects like astronomy, space, atom etc which I could understand, and, so, I went through them.

At that time, a monthly journal, *Adhunika*, was brought out by Nabayuga Sahitya Sansad in Cuttack. I wrote two to three essays on atom in that journal. I remember that those articles started with the criticism of the prayer mantra, 'Tad brahmaniskalamaham nacha bhutasangah'. I stated that in our religion, 'Bhutasangham', that is, inanimate objects are treated with indifference and it is said in the prayer that I am not an inanimate matter. I am 'Niskalusa Brahma'. But inanimate matter is neither ignorable nor unholy. It is not as inanimate as we think.

I had also brought with me all those books which my uncle had used while learning shorthand in Calcutta and I practised shorthand. I always took down something from the books I read. Most of those were written in shorthand. Those notes are now lying with me but I cannot understand what I had written then. I have forgotten to read shorthand. At present nobody learns that method.

While staying there, I visited Shantiniketan for the first time. I had great attraction for Shantiniketan. After Uncle went there, I was interested in going there and studying. Uncle and Aunt went to Shantiniketan because Didima also stayed there. They sent for me. I went there for three to four days. On my way to Shantiniketan, I went to Abhaya Ashram which was located at Harrison Road. There I heard someone playing a Bengali song in a gramophone: '*Pralay nachan nachle jakhan aapan bhule, he Nataraj! Jataar bandhan padai khule*

. . .' I was enchanted by the meter and the music of the song and it seemed a good beginning of my journey to Shantiniketan.

At that time, Gurudev lived in Shantiniketan. We went to meet him. One day, we found him reading out and explaining one of his poems or perhaps he was taking a class. Another day, he was reading out the manuscript of his new novel, *Char Adhyaya* (Four Chapters) which had received much criticism. In all, fifteen persons were present in the audience. One of them was Indira Nehru. The novel dealt with the role of women in the terrorist movement and suggested that a woman's dharma was not to be involved in it. After this book was printed, the stated point of view of the poet faced scathing criticism. But we all liked the book.

I visited all the departments of Shantiniketan with uncle and aunt. On seeing all these different places, they felt nostalgic. We met Nandalal Basu as well. At that time, I had almost given up drawing pictures. (I wrote 'almost' because I had drawn a few cartoons while staying in Calcutta). Nonetheless, I was still interested in drawing. I had a special taste for the pictures drawn by Nandababu.

Uncle and others talked about the atmosphere of Shantiniketan at the time. They said that it lacked the atmosphere of freedom which prevailed during their time. Many things had reverted to the usual old manner. Unlike earlier days, boys and girls could not mix with one another easily and freely. Learning had followed the usual method of schools as well. All these made me sad.

Cottage Leather Industry

Land and house were taken in the barren area towards the end of the east of the town for setting up of a tannery. 'Dhapaar Maath' which means the end of an area started from the other side of our boundary. The town ended there. It was a large boundary. Perhaps it was a jute godown earlier because a big pressing machine to bind

jutes was installed there. Two two-storeyed buildings stood to the south and to the west and a long gable-shaped and tin-roofed room stood to the north. A pond lay in the middle.

At first the work commenced with three to four persons: Biren Khan, Pareshbabu, a couple of other persons and I. Gradually machinery arrived and the work went on speedily. First, one Basu, an expert in tanning, came. He said that he was the nephew of the reknowned litterateur Budhadeb Basu. He was more talkative than active. Then Hari Saha came. This gentleman knew tanning very well and the tannery progressed well under his supervision. Gradually trainees came from different provinces on behalf of Harijan Sebak Sangh in order to receive training here. Among them, Bantu Wantaka Reddy hailed from Andhra Pradesh, Guruswamy who was later known as 'Little' hailed from Tamil Nadu, Kadirvelu, two harijan boys, Yash Giga Mawkwana and Hamir Mulaji Paramar, and an educated young man Bhikhubhai Dhruba came from Gujurat. Another Gujarati, Kalyanji Solanki, also joined. Na. Ra. Sowani and P. C. Adichan hailed from Maharastra and Kerala respectively. The later one became a member of the Lok Sabha in Independent India. He told us that his full name was Pereketekedekettil Channan Adichan. The first word means the man whose house is located in this direction of this village. Three harijan children from Bengal joined. Malappa Rudrappa Kadigedar hailed from Karnatak and Pitambara, the younger brother of the reknowned social worker Acharya Jugal Kishore, came from Uttar Pradesh and Sohanlal hailed from Rajasthan.

Brother Biren was the guardian of our group. It may be said here that though his title was 'Khan', he was a Brahmin. As he was not much senior to us, he could not exercise much of his guardianship. At first Satisbabu did not stay there. He came everyday and devoted five to seven hours to supervising the work. Later a

room with a frail matting of bamboo all around and a thatched roof was built for him and he stayed there. Here he did not follow the rules of his ashram strictly. We five lived happily. Each one of us had a peculiar trait of character. Sohanlal was keen on learning the harmonium. So he searched for a music school. He went there to learn music every evening. Sometimes, when he returned late in the night, he jumped over the locked gate and entered. On account of this, one day, there was a shout of 'thief, thief'. Solanki went out dressed smartly saying that the girls would stare at him. He was despondent and was fickle like a camel of Kadigodara. In every matter he had a negative attitude. Later another person, Bansidhar Nayak, came from Orissa. He was like a spring-doll in his manners and behaviour. Later he worked with me in the tannery at Bari and then became a teacher. Dhruba was not interested in studies. He liked to indulge in serious discussions only.

We had fun involving a new-comer from Frontier Province. He was named some Gandhi. On seeing the situation here, perhaps, he wanted to leave the place. He said that he could not relish the food served here. Satisbabu replied that he would be given whatever food he liked. But he always replied in the negative. Finally, he was sent outside with another person. After they returned, it was learnt that he took meat and paratha in an ordinary Punjabi hotel. He was assured that he would be given all that. But he left finally.

Our food was ordinary. Milk was available. An Oriya boy called Bishnu was the cook. At that time, the expenditure per head came to five to six rupees a month. Date sugar was available in plenty. Lots of molasses were required in the tannery to prepare 'crome liquor'. Mounds of date-sugar were purchased at the rate of four to five paisa. It was also bought for our mess. Eating lumps of date-sugar at three meal times, we finished one pot of it in three or four days. Daily, on an average, three fourths of a kilo of molasses

was spent per head. One day brother Biren complained to Satisbabu about this. Satisbabu said, "If they are eating, let them eat. It is a good thing." So we ate with more enthusiasm. Perhaps the method of preparing *upma* out of flattened rice was tried out there first.

Except in one area of Guwahati, I never saw the way in which mosquitoes became rampant here. Swarms of mosquitoes thronged when evening approached. Perhaps one mosquito occupied each cubic centimeter. At night, even the mosquito net failed to help. Twenty-five to fifty mosquitoes entered the net. At last we invented an indigenous method to kill mosquitoes. Untying the four corners of mosquito nets, we rolled over these twice or thrice from one end to the other when the nets fell flat. All the mosquitoes were pressed to death under rollers, our bodies.

Non-Hindi children started learning Hindi here. In Tamil alphabet, there are only first and last letters in every bargamala. The middle letters like *ka, nha, cha, nya, ta, na* are missing. So it is difficult to pronounce *kha, ga, gha,* etc. They pronounce, 'Ham khana khate hai' in Hindi as 'Ham kana kate hai'. If you asked them to pronounce 'kha', they would say, 'Ham gana gate hai'.

One day an artisan, Gani, asked Guruswamy his name and other things and finally asked in Hindi, 'Babu, have you got married?" Thinking for a while, Guruswamy replied in Hindi, 'Little little'. Everybody burst out laughing. What is 'Little little marriage?' Actually he could not follow the question and did not know whether to give a positive answer or a negative one. He answered 'a little, a little' so that it would suit both ways.

Twelve to fourteen skilled labourers worked in the tannery. Almost all of them hailed from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Dhanaki and Yantu were in charge of skinning hide. Goni Patent was in charge of leather. Takhi operated the machines which polished and shaved hind in equal proportions. Phaguni coloured the leather and

put the nails. Ram tanned hide using the bark of some tree. Abdul had worked in a khadi institute earlier. He was an expert in doing very fine and accurate work. I have been nurtured by the affection and co-operation of all of them and others.

Here hide was tanned with the help of crome using modern methods. Besides, tanning was also made through the country method using bark of harida, sunani, babul etc. Mainly various types of leather were prepared for the upper and the lower parts of shoes. We trainees worked for eight to nine hours alongside the workers. Rather, on some days, we had to work more than they. When a truck loaded with raw hide arrived after the factory was closed, we unloaded those. If any urgent work needed attention on Sundays, we had to attend to that.

Working with ordinary workers on equal footing for complete eight hours, I gained confidence regarding my working capacity. We had to learn and tan and all other activities associated with it and I became efficient in all these. Leather which was tanned and coloured was put on large planks like bed stead and was dried up after nailing it at its edges. Then it was polished. Phaguni and I did this job. Gradually my efficiency surpassed his. While doing all these chores, I realized that some sort of artistry was involved in completing a job in a perfect manner and one derives a special type of self-satisfaction from it. Only I could not master the art of lighting a coal hearth, though I did it for many days.

In addition to producing leather in this tannery and making it economically self-sufficient, it was also part of the experiment to see how the machinery used here could be made in a small size so that it could be used in small-scale production in villages. A few of these machinery ran successfully and I used them at Bari.

After starting the tannery, Satisbabu took 'Bhagad' in Howrah, which is the place where bodies of animals were thrown away, on

lease. Earlier contractors took only the hide of dead cattle and buffaloes and some fat from under their hide. All other parts provided a feast for vultures, dogs and jackals. Satisbabu planned to make use of the entire body. Except the hide, flesh and bones were cut into pieces, dried up and powdered with the help of machinery and converted into manure. The machinery to powder bones was installed in our tannery. This manure was in great demand in the tea gardens. It was sold at three rupees per maund. The intestines were dried up and sold. It was required for preparing sausage. Before the flesh was dried up and powdered, it was boiled and the fat was taken out of it. This fat was purified and used for preparing soap. Seventeen to eighteen seers of fat could be extracted from a cow. In this way, a method was found out to make good use of the carcasses and a great deal of profit was made from the morgue of Howrah. Brother Shyam was placed in charge of it.

A chemical laboratory was also set up in our tannery. The arrangement was such that eight persons could work simultaneously. One chemist, Indubhusan Basu, was placed in charge of it. Indubabu also received training in leather technology from Kanpur. It was always necessary to make experiments regarding different aspects of tanning. Besides, the laboratory was also arranged to instruct trainees regarding elementary chemistry. I took full advantage of it. In addition to learning and doing daily experiments regarding production, I gained experience by reading and doing practical work. Besides experimenting on leather production, I experimented on various applications of ordinary organic and inorganic chemicals, their quantitative and qualitative analysis and production of many compound matters. It is doubtful whether university students got opportunity to work for two to three hours daily in the laboratory. Sometimes, when the tannery was closed, I remained engaged throughout the day. Indubabu encouraged and assisted me a great

deal in this. A warm relationship developed between us. I have never met him after I left that place.

Satisbabu also talked to us regularly, sometimes on chemistry and sometimes on food. He clearly explained so that at least I could easily follow. Satisbabu was engaged in finding simple methods to make chemical experiments on tanning in villages. So, rubbing petals of China rose on blotting paper, he found an alternative to litmus paper. He instructed us how to use of lemon juice to find out the quantity of alkali in any solution. Like this, he successfully applied many other things. Out of these I successfully used a few in the tannery at Bari.

A strange man joined the laboratory. His name was Babulal Burma. He hailed from some place in Uttar Pradesh. He had passed the M.Sc. examination in Chemistry. He was very efficient in laboratory work. While experimenting, he was oblivious of eating and drinking. He was suffused with the idea of sacrifice. He stayed in a damp house in the labour colony with his wife and daughter. Water measuring half a feet rose inside the house during rain. This sacrifice was a manifestation of his foolishness. He never listened to anybody. At last his wife and child died of illness. Later he went to the Khadi institute at Sonepur and lived there permanently. He helped me learn in the laboratory as well. Babulal Burma and I were so eager to mingle with ordinary labourers that one day we carried blankets on our heads from the tannery in Khadi institute to a shop at the College Square which was at a distance of three miles.

Amidst all these, my socialist convictions became stronger. One day an editorial was published in the *Samaj* criticizing socialism and listing out its violent and non-violent aspects. I wrote a reply to it. That was published in the *Sarathi*. Reading that article, father wrote to me that the article was very good but that it was rather long. I do not remember the context, but I had an argument with Satisbabu

regarding socialism. I argued that the property of the zamindars and the mutts should be made public property. He tried to make me understand that it was not necessary. I gave examples of acts of atrocities on the part of zamindars and the mahantas.

At that time, thoughts about religion occupied my mind. I was not prepared to admit that religion like opinum cheated people. But the broad view of Gandhianism which prevailed at the time urging each person to follow his or her own individual religion and have faith in it did not appeal to me much. At that time, I concluded that all religions are same on the ground that all are equally faulty.

At the Village in Bengal

In 1935 or 1936 famine struck Mayamansingh district of Bengal. The condition of the people was deplorable. As trees bore plenty of mangoes, the poor lived on mangoes only. Satisbabu sent me there to take photographs showing the predicament of the people. Kshitishbabu was the younger brother of Satisbabu. He lived with his wife at Sodapur ashram. We called him Kakababu (Uncle). He was not sociable by nature. But he was a very affectionate and learned person. The people at Khadi institute were scared of him because of his grave disposition. He was very keen on managing things properly. One day I borrowed the camera stand from him. The stand was kept exactly in the same cover, folded with the same paper and tied with the same thread with which it was bought. While lending me the stand, he warned me that it should be returned intact. I left for Mayamansingh, taking the camera and other things of Kakababu.

I boarded the train from Sealdah station to Sirajganj ghat and took a steamer to Phulbadi ghat and then to Tangail. On the way a funny thing happened in the train. A few rustic Oriya people in my compartment were traveling to some place. After they got off,

some Bengalies in the compartment sneered at them. They got down at the next station. I helped them unload their luggage and while they thanked me, I said, "You made comments on Oriyas. I am also an Oriya. It's not good to comment like that." They felt embarrassed and begged forgiveness.

The steamer left at dawn and reached Phulbadi ghat at four in the afternoon. I enjoyed my first journey by a steamer on river Padma a great deal. There were vast stretches of water in the river. At times, the other side of the bank was not visible from this side. The steamer journeyed along the shore. Villages, covered with dense trees, bordered the river bank. Seated on the steamer and swayed by endless motion, scenes of the daily life of the people could be seen. Peasants were ploughing. Travellers were walking along the path by the side of the river. Village women and daughters-in-law were scrubbing utensils, taking bath and filling water pots at ghats. Children were playing in the orchards on the bank. Cowherd boys were grazing cows. When the steamer reached the ghat, people hurried to get off and get into the steamer. A noisy scene was created. People brought horses to the ghats for hiring them out. Travellers would go to their villages, riding horses. These were ponies that lived on water hyacinth.

After reaching Phulbadi, I crossed a streamlet by a boat. Then I went to Tangail by a horse-drawn carriage and located the godown of the Khadi institute. There the workers made good arrangement for my lodging and boarding. There I saw a latrine on a well for the first time. Arrangement was made to sit on a wooden plank placed on a well with and a mat around it. Then I saw tree-latrine at Malikanda. One climbed up a tree and defecated oneself sitting on a bifurcated branch. That part of the branch was surrounded by something to maintain privacy. A knotted bamboo ladder and another bamboo prop were put there for climbing up the tree. A

pond was dug beneath it to store the excreta. If one slipped from the branch, he would fall into the pit and his sins of many births would be washed away.

Next morning, a co-worker and I went out, hiring two horses. In East Bengal, horses were available on hire for this purpose in every village. I had never ridden a horse before in my life. When I rode a horse, I was scared at first. After two to three hours, I was used to it and did not feel frightened. I travelled through many villages throughout the day and took many photographs. I saw the pitiable condition of the poor. On the way, I saw a big haat on the bank as well. People came to this haat, carrying their wares in boats. Many boats were found at the ghat near the haat. The boats of this area were shaped artistically. These were not like the rectangular mats of our Cuttack area which were meant for practical use.

By the time I returned after roaming around, I was careless in riding the horse. The horse ran fast along a slope. I lost control and somersaulted above the head of the horse and fell down. The ju jutsu which I had learnt in the jail had made me used to falling down on my face and back to the ground so that I would not be hurt after falling down. Perhaps, because of that practice my body automatically went fell down in such a way that I was not hurt. I stood up dusting myself and ascended the horse again. I took only mangoes, milk and puffed rice throughout the day. There I learnt to take these items mixed together. In fact, that year mangoes grew in plenty in that area though the harvest was damaged. Even the cattle grazed on the mangoes. People lived on mangoes only. Some of the pictures that I took there were published in the *Anand Bazar Patrika* and the *Prabashi*. After this visit, I went to Atra area of North Bengal to take photographs of the deplorable state of the cattle.

In the meantime, my mother fell ill at Bari. Perhaps she suffered

from nervous debility on account of hard labour. Receiving the message, Doctor Indranarayan Sengupta went to Bari. Then I received the news and went to Bari. After Gandhiji's padayatra to Bari, it was my first visit to this place. When Indranarayanbabu was staying at Bari, patients of the village called on him. One day a child who had a boil on his neck came to him. It was to be operated upon. Indranarayan handed a knife to me and said, "Take it, cut." I cut the boil. That was my first and last operation. Mother was taken to Cuttack. At that time, going from Bari to Cuttack meant catching a train at Haridaspur and travelling twenty-two miles by bullock cart. It took twelve hours to travel this distance by bullock cart. Mother was carried by a palanquin. Saint Ramdas came to see mother. He accompanied mother to Cuttack. On the way to Haridaspur, crossing the river Kelua at Bandhadiha, we took rest on the other side. At that time the saint who lagged behind appeared on the other bank, riding a cycle. On seeing us, he called out, 'Sita Ram' and glided the cycle on the narrow path down the river embankment. Then a scream was heard. He had kept a spindle in a big khadi bag which slung from his shoulder. It pierced his back. We rolled laughing. As a result of her treatment in Cuttack, my mother's health improved. After some days I returned to Calcutta.

Some Experiences

While learning leather work, I had two bitter experiences. One day raw hide was brought by train. I went to Howrah to release it. There the luggage clerks took four to eight annas as bribe to settle the railway bill. I was also asked to do that. A person who stood beside me outside whispered to me to give three annas. But I was adamant I did not pay. So the babu found out some mistake in the bill and returned it. Again I went next day and tried my best. But all the babus remained silent as soon as they saw my bill. Finally, I

went to meet the Superintendent. The peon showed no interest in allowing me inside unless he received money. I forced myself inside. The Superintendent said that I had to write a bond on behalf of the institution and take luggage. On one hand, it was raw hide, though salt was applied to it, and, on the other, it was the possibility of it being damaged in the heat that increased day by day. On the third day, brother Biren went there and reclaimed hide, satisfying the babus. But the babus at Sealdah station knew the Khadi institute. When I went there to reclaim it, they did not ask for money, hearing that it belonged to that institute.

One day brother Biren and I went to Pakud to buy hide. We boarded the train from Howrah, reached Pakud at night and slept outside the station. When we woke up in the morning, we found his coat pocket was cut and the money purse had disappeared. A search found, the motor driving license which was put inside it lying in a nearby drain. There were two hundred rupees inside the purse. Both of us were without a pie. Borrowing four or five rupees from the station master, we sent a telegram to Calcutta and had our food. We lodged a complaint with the G.R.P. The police sub-inspector came to investigate the case of theft at noon. He was an elderly Muslim, fat and with a pointy beard. He took evidence from us. He took the coat of brother Biren from which the pocket was cut as an exhibit and then returned. He took a receipt of return signed by him without date. He said if the coat would be required for the case later, he would take it. We understood from this that here the police inquiry was completed in this matter. Only the final report was left to be written. After some days, Father Thakkar advised us a lot on being careful about this theft of money.

Though I derived a great deal of satisfaction, learning and doing many types of work there, perhaps the longing to return home had started within me. In 1936, news about the visit of Jawaharlal to

Orissa spread across. I wrote to Uncle about my desire to go to Orissa at that time and be present at his meeting. As the secretary of State Congress Committee, brother Bhagu wrote to me, "You will welcome Jawaharlal in Kolkata on behalf of the State Congress." Not realizing the gravity of this duty, I only met the associate of Punditji, Upadhyayaji, at Howrah station and came to Cuttack by Madras Mail. They came by Puri Express. I had come after informing Satisbabu. The next day I heard that Upadhyayaji had expected that I would accompany them in the train and tell them where to alight. Not finding me, he took a time-table and watched railway station throughout the night and came to Jagatpur. They got down there, finished their work at Kendrapara area and then came to Cuttack. At that time, river Mahanadi had to be crossed by a boat or motor-launch. I accompanied Nehru to Puri. There I had a severe attack of malaria. I stayed at the residence of Uncle Balu till I recovered. Sister Ruka nursed me a lot.

Bari Area

Then I came to Bari and resumed my normal course of work. Reaching Bari, I received a letter from Satisbabu. He was hurt as I had left suddenly. He had planned many things for me. He wanted to instruct me on many things. But I was not to be influenced by the design of others.

In 1934, father and others reached Bari during the rainy season. There is history behind his choosing this place as the centre of his activities. In 1920, when father was the Second Officer at Jajpur, he had come here to distribute relief during the flood and he had asked the government to declare it famine area. When pressure mounted from the higher authorities to change the report, he left his salaried job in protest. In 1930, during the Salt Movement, Bari was the center of protest and many men and women Satyagrahis

emerged from there. In 1934, the padayatra of Gandhiji passed through Bari. After the padayatra, Gandhiji said to father, "The route through which I passed will yield gold if work is done in these areas." Then father chose Bari as the centre of his village activities on account of his earlier association with it.

It is a flood prone area and one of the poorest areas in Orissa. Only saying flood prone area does not make any sense. This area is sacrificed for the benefit of the protected shore areas on this side of river Kharashuan to the north and on that side of the Birupa to the south. The embankments to the north of Kharashuan and to the south of Birupa had narrowed gradually. As a result, the route for flood water that enters Bari area had narrowed down gradually like the mouth of a funnel. Down this area, the embankment which protected Aali area had narrowed the escape route of flood water like the glass ball at the neck of soda bottles and olden days. Besides, waters from three main rivers of Orissa—the Mahanadi, the Brahmani and the Baitarani—entered this area. The water of the Mahanadi flowed through the Birupa and its tributary. The water of the Brahmani passed through the Kharashuan and the water of the Baitarani flowed through its tributary, the Budha, to this area.

Kasturi Mrugasama

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A Student in Kolkata
Bikram Das

Translated by Bishnupriya Hota

Just as I stepped into the second year of Intermediate Science, on being promoted from the first year, two years seemed to pass by swiftly in the political storm of 1942. I was in a quandary. The situation became such that I sank into a slough of despair when I heard that some of my elders disparaging my political activities were criticizing me in my absence as 'an unworthy truant born to a savants' clan'.

My long-cherished dream of becoming a doctor by studying in a medical college had by then turned into a castle in the air. Till 1943, district-wise, only four of the students were selected on the basis of merit by Government of Orissa to study in Patna Medical college. In 1943, the overall I.Sc. results were so poor that even students who passed in third division were selected for having been the highest scorer in their respective districts. But to think about it, was to scratch where there was no itch.

Desire to pursue study

In 1944, my second brother-in-law, Engineer Madhusudan Das, after graduating from Jadavpur Engineering College, joined as an apprentice in a factory in Calcutta. Realizing my mental agony he contacted Gopal Bhattacharya, the principal in charge of the I.Sc. Section of the Carmichael Medical College through a common friend and then sent for me. I became hopeful of getting a seat in

the Medical College by virtue of passing I.Sc from the same college.

Accordingly, I went to Calcutta and met Gopalbabu. When he came to know of my parentage he gladly said that there would not be a single college or institution in India, especially in Bengal, that would not like to admit the son of Nilakantha Das. Overjoyed at his words, I returned to Cuttack. .

Somehow I managed to get the college leaving certificate from Ravenshaw College and then approached Mr Jagannath Mishra (father of my schoolmate Raju), the then Assistant Registrar of the newly formed university. At last, after collecting the university migration certificate without anyone's knowledge I went back to Calcutta.

On 2 July 1943 Netaji Subhas reached Rangoon and declared the formation of the Indian National Army and the Provisional Government of free India on the 4th of July. The British Government, then, tried to evict people from the East Bengal region by creating an artificial scarcity of food. As a result of which there was great influx of people from those regions to the big cities like Calcutta. Due to short supply, the prices of essential commodities like that of rice and flour rose sky high in Calcutta. My brother-in-law Madhusudan Babu, as an apprentice, got only rupees one hundred per month and stayed with his family in a rented house in an old woman's house at rupees thirty per month. His house consisted of the entrance room of the building and its adjoining verandah. As I was to stay with him as a guest, I emptied bags full of rice into pillow covers, carefully tucked them in a trunk along with my books and clothes, bought an interclass ticket, boarded the Puri-Howrah Express and reached Calcutta. As restrictions were imposed on the transportation of rice and the railway compartments were thoroughly searched, I got down at Howrah and carefully walked out of the station, boarded a bus to Bali via Belur. On

reaching the Bali bus stop, I hired a porter to carry the trunk and ultimately reached his house.

Cheated in Admission

The very next day I went to Carmichael Medical College carrying all my certificates and tried to contact Gopalbabu. Even though he was informed he did not care to meet me. Instead he sent a message to meet the principal of the medical college through his peon. Gopalbabu was not in charge of admissions into the I.Sc. section. Keeping in view the admissions into the medical college, the principal of the medical college himself was selecting students for the I.Sc. section. When I inquired from a clerk of the office, he informed me, "In this college, there is no such provision for admitting students like you who seek admission into the second year classes. Again, you are a domicile of another state. In addition to that, you have crossed the age limit.You have no chance of getting admission into this college." I wanted to meet the principal even after hearing all these but was refused.

Disappointed, I returned. On my way back I met my one-time teacher and elder brother of my eldest brother-in-law Shri Bighneswar Rath. He then stayed in Ballyganj and took admission into M.Sc. in Zoology. He told me, "Sri Premananda Mohanty (elder brother of Prof. Jagananda Mohanty) is the principal of St. Paul College. He is an Oriya Christian. He has deep respect for your father Pt. Nilakantha. Please come with me to him. He will surely be glad to see you. I hope he will admit you in his college."

I consoled myself by saying that according to the principle of *when all fruits fail welcome crows* let me at least be a graduate in any subject by completing I.Sc. from any of the colleges in Calcutta. Reflecting on it, I accompanied Bighneswarbabu to Premanandababu's house, heart full of hope. I was made to wait

outside while he went inside to meet the principal. I waited hopefully expecting his call but the invitation never came. Bighneswarbabu came back and told me that the college which was established by the Christians would not admit me. Due to famine, that year the Christian students of the college had performed very badly and, as such, they were being readmitted into the second year. So the principal replied to him in negative.

After returning from Mr. Mohanty, I tried my luck in many other colleges but with little success. And then I came to know that the last date of admission into the colleges had already been over and was disappointed. How could I face any one back at Cuttack when I had already brought the migration certificate? There was no question of my returning to Cuttack.

At this juncture, while I was wandering, I came across one of the followers of Subash Bose. He took me to their secret office. They felt the necessity of a strong organization in Assam to welcome the Indian National Army when it would enter India. So they were planning to send some of their active members to Assam. They did not have a great problem in selecting me.

I decided to go to Assam and proceeded to Sialdah station to enquire about the scheduled departure of the train. I was moving through the narrow lanes instead of on the main road, and it was in one such narrow lane that I could hear commotion from the top floor of a three-storeyed building. From afar, I mistook it to be a storehouse for jute but coming nearer to the front of the house I could see a marble statue and the national flag fluttering nearby inside the premises. When my eyes fell on the signboard with "Bangabasi College" inscribed on it, I entered the premises.

Getting Enrolled in Bangabasi College

I went up the wooden staircase. On the verandah close to the landing

I saw a fat man with sandal-paste marks on his forehead conversing with a college student (Jagdish Mahapatra from Mayurbhanj) in Oriya. I heard them and then went near them, enquired in Oriya about their names and addresses. The elder one was the peon there. His name was Bholanath Panda. He informed me that he had been working in that college since his childhood and wanted to know my name, address and the purpose of my visit. I replied that I came from Cuttack with a view to getting admission into the second year class of I.Sc. but as I could not get a seat in any of the colleges there, I was wandering aimlessly.

When he heard that I was from Cuttack, he jumped up and said, "You have come from our Cuttack and you cannot get a seat to pursue your studies in any of the colleges in Calcutta! Let us see, I have brought the principal up since his childhood. His father was the principal here. The present principal has studied in England and on his return he first became a lecturer here. Now after his father's death, he has become the principal. You please wait here, let me go in and try." After a while he returned and led me away to the principal. The Principal, Prasanta Bose, though UK-returned, was a nationalist. He was very calm and quiet by nature. He offered me a seat and then enquired about my identity and difficulties. On earlier occasions, I had the bitter experience of being humiliated by queries about my father's identity. Hence, this time I preferred not to reveal my father's identity. I simply told him that I was a revolutionary student. As I had certain difficulties in pursuing my studies there in Orissa and as I still had one year left, I wanted to take admission into the second year I.Sc. to complete the course.

The principal interviewed me for a pretty long time and asked various questions relating to India's political scenario, revolution and topics relating to the syllabus. Then he seemed to be satisfied and said, "This College is the college of revolutionary *biplabi* Jatin. I can

never return a revolutionary student and I can see, from the knowledge you have acquired, you can easily get a first class if you pursue your studies wholeheartedly. But.... but." When he paused after uttering 'but' I was a little depressed. Then he said, "I have some doubts. Even before you, many revolutionary students had taken admission in this college but they did not complete their courses as they lacked patience. Hence, though I feel that you should be given admission I cannot take a decision unless I know the circumstances which compelled you to come here and how long you can remain here patiently?" I replied with all humility, "There will never be any problem from the police during my stay here. I promise you I will not leave my studies halfway without appearing at the examination. Be sure about that from my side."

When he was satisfied with my reply, he agreed to my admission and directed me to come along with all my documents to take admission as early as possible. I returned to my residence, collected my certificates and reached the college before it was closed for the day. After verifying my certificates he granted my application and gave directions to the clerk. Bholi Panda was with me all along. Just when I deposited my fees, he told me, "Go to market and bring a basket full of oranges. I'll be waiting here." At this I laughed and said, "Why cheap oranges, instead of sweets or rasagollas?" Panda became a little grave and replied, "I don't need anything for myself. The clerk is an irresponsible one. Now it is time for the office to be closed and if you don't take admission now, he will return you again and again for days together without completing the procedure of admission. If you give him oranges for his tiffin he will eat them peeling them one by one and go on doing the job. I can also pressurize him to finish the work today even if it becomes late so that your work will be over today itself."

After the work was over, I went with Panda to his place. It was

a small low-roofed room made of wood carved out between the lending places of the lower and the upper flight of stairs. One had to enter the room by lowering one's head. At the other end of the room there were photos of different deities. Panda used the space both as a living room and a worship room. Later I came to know that though he was a peon, everyone, from the principal to the professors, including the clerks, respected him for his honesty and saintly nature and he used to bless them all.

Nationalist Independent Teachers

That college was a strange institution. The teachers were highly proficient in their respective subjects but as they were all nationalists, they served in the colleges voluntarily, with a desire to only serve the nation, without seeking any remuneration. They could donate from their own income whenever needed.

From among the Professors, our English Professor Shri R.K. Chakrabarty was a member of the Central Legislature. When the Legislative Assembly was not in session he was engaged in teaching. While teaching Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*, he narrated the episode of the thirsty mariner who in spite of being surrounded by sea was not able to quench his thirst, from the stanza 'Water, water everywhere not a drop to drink' in such a lively manner that it is still vivid in my memory.

L.M. Mitra, whose chemistry book was prescribed throughout India as a course book, was the honorary professor of chemistry in our chemistry department. He earned his livelihood as an advocate in the Sealdah court. Even students from other colleges used to come to his classes. The chemistry hall was filled to overflowing. So, in order to get a seat in the front in his periods we used to bunk the preceding class and occupy the front seats much earlier. When I was taught the chapter on 'Metal' in the first year classes at Cuttack

I had not been able to comprehend it, but Prof. Mitra taught it so wonderfully and in such a dramatic manner that all of us were enthralled and grasped it well.

Stay at Calcutta

I had to stay in my brother-in-law's house as I could not manage to get a seat in any of the messes in Calcutta. I had to go to Bangabasi College from Bali everyday. The trains and buses were overcrowded due to famine. I had to go to Howrah from Bali by bus and then catch the train from there. Sometimes if I could not manage to get a seat in the bus I had to reach Dakhineswar, ferried across the Ganges by a boat and then went to Shyambazaar by bus .From there I had to catch a train and reach Sealdah from where I had to walk all the way to college. Sometimes I had to enter the bus through the window and if somehow I could manage to get through it, I had to remain standing all the way. That was why, even though I used to start before 8 a.m. I could never reach college on time. Likewise, it was late at night when I returned home.

Due to physical exhaustion, I used to feel tired and sleepy by the time I reached home, even though I used to splash water on my eyes to remain awake I had to face a lot more other difficulties. I was living in the entrance room. The light emitted by a 40-watt bulb that lighted the room was not sufficient for reading. In addition, the landlady was very problematic. The landlady stayed upstairs and grumbled. The daughter of the family was quite grown up but was under the constant surveillance of her elder brothers. The four grown up unemployed youths were almost always there at home. There was a door in the boundary wall that surrounded the courtyard but they were used to using the door of the entrance room where I lived. If I ever dared to complain, they used to scold me calling me as 'ude' and the like. After I left, my brother-

in-law also shifted to another house which he found after a frantic search. When he vacated the house, I wrote on the wall the following lines in devnagari script:

An old woman, quarrelsome by nature
Hyper active is her daughter,
All her sons, overpowered by senses
Mischievous and ruthless
The whole house was but a thoroughfare for them
Chiding is their weapon
Remember well this is the story of the house
That scares away the tenants.

Our college did not provide housing facilities. For the benefit of the students, the Calcutta University had arranged a mess, named Canning hostel, near our college, but it was always fully occupied. Some of my classmates stayed there and very often I stayed with them for studying.

As I faced a lot of difficulties in my studies, I met the principal just a day before the puja holidays and told him, "Sir, I had promised you to complete my studies till the examinations got over but under the present circumstances it is not possible on my part to continue my studies. If you do not help me find an accommodation near the college, I will be compelled to leave my studies due to hardship."

In response to my request, the principal replied, "Realizing the difficulties of students like you who are from other states, I have arranged a hostel exclusively for the students of our college. I have already given advance for the same. The house is being repaired now and by the time the college reopens after the puja holidays, the house must be ready for use as a hostel. Now you deposit fifty rupees in the office along with an application. When you return after the puja holidays, you can stay there." Immediately I went to the office and deposited the required fees along with an application.

Returning from the village, after a month-long puja vacation, I went straight to my friend Ramaniranjan Mukherjee in the Canning hostel, kept my luggage there and then went to the principal. He advised me to meet Prof. Dasgupta, Head of the Department of Botany, whom he had appointed as the superintendent of the New Hostel.

When Prof. Dasgupta heard my request, he told me harshly, "There is no space in the hostel. As against few seats, the principal has collected seat rents from many students. Now let him solve the problem himself. I can do nothing. You have no chance of getting a seat there. You better go and tell him."

During my brief stay there, from whatever experience I had gathered, I knew that if Prof. Dasgupta decided against me even the principal would not be able to help me. Each one of the teachers of the college thought himself to be great. The principal was not able to influence the professors in their decisions. So it would not produce any result if I complained to the principal against any of the teachers.

I remembered an incident that had taken place just before the holidays. During the British rule, the Bible was a compulsory subject included in the English syllabus of the Calcutta University. The Professor who taght Bible was rich and sophisticated. He was fair and bald-headed. He used to come to college, clad in a pure white dhoti and kurta, a folded shawl placed carefully on his shoulder, gold-framed spectacles adorning his eyes, powder on his face and fragrance of scent emanating from his clothes.

A wooden fan with thin blades was fitted in the room where our Bible classes were held. One day while the class was on, a wooden blade of the fan broke loose, flew over our heads, crashed against the wall and fell down. Fortunately, it did not hit any student. The teacher flared up and said, "What a nice college the principal is

running. Why do the parents send their wards here? To read or to die?" Saying this, he picked up the wooden piece, tucked it under his armpit and rushed to the principal. The principal begged forgiveness and thus pacified him. Then only the teacher returned to the class.

Realizing the power and influence of these teachers, I decided not to go to the principal, but to follow Dasgupta. As I stood there in front of him for a long time, he felt uncomfortable and, looking at me, he said, "So you don't believe me! Then follow me. I am going there. You will see for yourself and then realize." Saying this he jumped off the chair and began to move. Just then P.G. student of Botany bowed down and touched his feet and followed him. I followed both of them.

Seat in the New Mess

Prof. Dasgupta entered a very ordinary looking room that was newly constructed on the first floor of an old house, situated in a narrow lane, by opening the front gate on the boundary wall of the courtyard and told me, "Verify for yourself how many students' names appear in this list and how many seats are there." Even before he could complete the sentence, his disciple pointed to a small room in front of which it was written 'One seat' and said, "Sir I will stay in this room." Dasgupta could not deny and agreed to his request. He nodded his head in confirmation and put a tick mark on the list he was carrying. Then he climbed up the stairs and reached the first floor. I walked behind him. There, in front of a small room it was written 'Three seats'. I pointed towards that room and said, "I will stay in that room." Dasgupta was a very simple and agreeable person. He couldn't deny me after saying 'Yes' to his favourite disciple. "Yes," he said spontaneously but he did not put the tick mark against my name and went upstairs to his office, carrying the

file. I ascertained from him that he would be there for almost an hour. He asked me to meet him the next day and not to bore him anymore.

I went straight to Canning hostel carrying my baggage. Before he could see me, I went to the nearby Sashi Bhusan Dey street, purchased a cot, a table and a bench, all roughly made by nailing deodar planks, especially by the porters, and arranged them in the room. It cost me only for three rupees and fifty paisa. I had brought my friend from Canning hostel along with me and had made him sit there in the room. With his help I spread the bed. Then he went away saying that he was to attend some other work.

When Prof. Dasgupta heard the sounds coming from my room, he sent for me and asked, "What are you doing here instead of going away?" I replied, "Sir, I am arranging my belongings." He then said, "Why did you come immediately," I told him, "Where else will I stay? I thought it to be better than the verandah or the footpath, which is why I was compelled to come in spite of your refusal."

He told me, "No watchman has been appointed yet. Who will open the gate for you?"

I told, "Sir, please do not bother. You just leave the keys with me. I will manage and will not move out of the hostel for two to three days." He said, "The mess is yet to function. How will you eat?" I replied, "I will take my meals from the same place as you." He then told me, "How could it be? I take my meals as a guest in the Kenning hostel." Even before he could complete his sentence, I said, "Sir, a guest can also have a guest." At last he was irritated and said, "The electric connection is yet to be done. How will you stay in the dark?" I replied him, "Candles are available in plenty in the market." He was a bit bewildered by my replies and asked about my whereabouts. I replied, "I am a man from the jungle. My

house is in the Sundarbans." He made a swollen face and said, "Now go away from here. After I finish my job I will again discuss the matter with you."

Prof. Dasgupta finished his official assignments. On his way back, peeping into my room, he found me studying and commented, "Hello, you have transformed this room into a heaven. I have never seen such a strange boy in my life. Let me know your real identity." I then replied, "Sir, perhaps you didn't believe me when I said that I am a tiger even though I told you that my home is the Sunderbans." Poor Dasgupta burst into a peal of laughter and said, "I cannot defeat you?" and handed over the keys of the gate to me and instructed me to hand over the same to the watchman when he arrived and then went away to send the watchman.

Everything was arranged previously. Immediately the guard came. The electricity was connected before the evening. Assistant Superintendent Karunababu arrived with the cook. Within a day or two, the hostel was full. But none of the boarders was a native Bengali. Only students from East Bengal, Bihar and Assam were allotted seats.

At that time, Bengalis from Calcutta looked down upon the Oriya peons and cooks. So they were hesitant to reveal their true identities. They spoke Bengali mixed with Oriya, not in pure Oriya, but their love for the Oriya people was in no way lessened. Both the peon and cook of our mess were Oriyas. They talked in broken Bengali. But when they came to know that I was an Oriya, they addressed me as "Our Babu". During lunch time, the cook used to serve me two pieces of fish instead of one by putting an extra piece inside the heaps of rice served on the plate. It is not easy to forget the greatness of Bholi Panda, along with the cook and the peon, of their love for the Oriyas and the love they extended to me.

Pneumonia

As soon as the winter came, the boarders of the new hostel suffered from cough and cold due to its damp walls. By then, I had to work hard throughout the nights as my examinations were at hand. Again, I suffered from pneumonia. A doctor came and gave injections daily.

Due to the unhygienic conditions in Calcutta, small pox spread. An Assamese boy named Kalita who used to stay in my neighbouring room died of it. Many others suffered from the same disease. The health workers came and gave anti-pox vaccines to all. As my health had deteriorated due to pneumonia, I could not be inoculated. I was worried. But then I came to know of Pundit Binayak Mishra, the renowned lecturer of Oriya of our college, who was distributing anti-pox medicine. I brought Malendium-10 from him and took it. Somehow I did not catch small-pox.

Oriya Friends

During the period two of the students from Cuttack also studied in our college. I developed intimacy with them when they frequently visited me during my illness. Along with some other Oriya boys, they stayed in a very spacious room in a two-storeyed building. All of them led a luxurious and carefree life. All, except my friends Bata and Bibhuti, were engaged in the production of a film.

Bata and Bibhuti had little relation with their studies. As a result of which they had failed in the I.Sc. exams many times at Cuttack. That is why they had come to Calcutta. No doubt, they were very affectionate, but they lacked the sense of discipline in life. During the first week of the month, when they received money orders from their respective homes, they dressed up and dined in luxurious hotels. Costly cigars never parted from their lips. During the second week their dresses began to look dirty and cheap cigarettes hung

from lips. During the third week their food intake got restricted to *bara* and *piaji* only and bidis were seen on their lips. During the fourth week they smoked cigarette butts scattered on the floors of their residence and wore dirty clothes. In the evenings, they reached their friends like me to borrow. But they returned the same within the first week of the next month.

Their friends, the so called film producers, were looking for poor Oriya girls from the slum areas or the red light areas for the subject matter of their films. Bata and Bibhuti did not even hesitate to frequent the red light areas to help them. They collected subject matters from the women who were forcibly brought to be exploited till they grew old and then were deserted to live in utter poverty. These two friends collected many such materials related to the lives of such women and supplied them to the producers. As they were busy in these affairs they had virtually no time to give proper attention to their studies. Even when the examinations were nearer they could not concentrate on studies. They used to call me a pundit and considered me to be a treasure house of knowledge. They were secretly engaged in a plan. They ferried me across the hot Baitarini for examination in exchange of my knowledge.

The university examinations commenced. My seat was upstairs in the Burdawan building. I was still feeling weak. Even though I had recovered from illness, I was not feeling strong enough to climb up the stairs. So, on the recommendation of our principal, I was issued a pass by the university authority to use the electric lift.

Those two friends of mine were proficient in shrewdness, though not so in their studies. On reaching the examination hall, I discovered that behind my seat was Bibhuti's seat and behind his seat was Bata's. The invigilator was Shri Narayan Pati, an Oriya P.G. student from our university. It might have been so because only three of us were appearing for the Oriya subject with the P.G. students engaged as

invigilators. My friends had tactfully made such an arrangement.

The examination commenced. Just as I began writing, there were requests like, "Pandit, please sit leaning to one side. Keep your answer script in such a manner that we at the back can see." I had no other option but to do exactly as I was requested. One or two of the invigilators did suspect that they were copying from my answers. So they warned me and directed me to keep my answer script in the middle. But then Narayanbabu came pretending as if he was keeping a close watch and did not leave us all through the sitting. He did not even give scope to the other invigilators to come near us.

When the result was out, the results were in keeping with their plan. In the notification, I was placed in the first division, Bibhuti in the second and Bata in the third. At that time there was no engineering college in Orissa. Students from Orissa were sent to other states to study engineering through a process of selection. Bibhuti had applied for it. One of the members in the selection committee was a British officer. He asked him what took him so long to pass the I.Sc. examination. He then answered that he was late because he was working as an assistant under a contractor who was constructing the Charbatia Aerodrome in order to help the Government during the war. He was then selected to study engineering in the Gandhi College of Madras. It is an example of how a drowning man can reach the shore if he receives a little bit of encouragement. He became an engineer, got the government job and retired on reaching the age of superannuation. But now he is no more. Bata passed his B.A. from Cuttack and became a contractor. I have the news that he has retreated to his own village after he set up an independent business and is spending his old age there. The same Bata alias Shri Bibekananda Sahu had visited me many times but I have not seen him now for a pretty long time.

There is a difference of Hell and Heaven between the life of a

student and that of a family man. A student who is very brilliant during his student life and is appreciated by all may prove to be a failure in his career and in contrast a very ordinary unsuccessful student may exhibit excellence in his job and reach the highest position in the society. For example, Biju Pattanaik who was not interested in studies could reach the highest place in entrepreneurship and politics.

When I was in Calcutta, one Shri Ganesh Rath was there, appointed to a very high position. He was extraordinarily brilliant and the first ever geologist of Orissa. He had arranged a grand party on the occasion of *ekuuisia* of his first son to which he had invited all the Oriya students and entertained them with a sumptuous feast. But immediately after that he became the victim of red tapism and was compelled to relinquish his job.

Leading a poor life, he wandered through the town of Cuttack and died a premature death. It is because of this that the writers of the Puranas say, "Destiny decides everything, neither the knowledge nor the endeavours."

Jibanarchhapa
Bhubaneswar, Lark Books, 2005

Helping Riot Victims
Nilamani Routray

Translated by Sarthak Abhyuday

People belonging to different states lived in Calcutta. Many people belonging to Assam, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh had lost their lives in Calcutta riot. After the riot, the concerned governments sent their higher officials to collect information about the dead and their loss and submit their reports to the Government of West Bengal and the Government at the Centre, but the Government of our State did not send any such representative. Hrudananda Mallick, Abhay Charan Nayak, Aakuli Mishra, Ram Chandra Pattnaik, I and many more gathered to collect information about the people who were dead and injured in the riot. We established a non-governemmnt organisation named *Riot Distressed Oriya Enquiry Committee.* We opened its office at Bahu Bazar Street. Fortunately, for us, Biswanath Das visited our office to assist us in our work. He was the President of the Organisation, I was the General Secretary and Hrudananda Mallick was the Office Secretary.

This dreadful communal riot and the loss of thousands of lives in Calcutta had shocked the whole of the country. The Central Government appointed an enquiry commission under the supervision of Lord Spens, the Chief Justice of the Federal Court of India, to find the cause behind the riot, the extent of loss and damage and the number of people dead or injured. Shri Fazal Ali, the Chief Justice of Patna High Court, was one of the members of that commission. He later on, became the Governor of Orissa.

The government of the concerned states in question appointed higher police officials and legal advisors to help in presenting information about the loss of lives in other states before the Spens Commission. Though the Oriyas suffered the most in the riot in comparison to the people of other states, the Government of Orissa did not plan anything to help in compiling information about the loss of lives in other states. Government of Orissa did not do much in the matter. Only a nominal amount of five hundred rupees per month was given to the aforesaid enquiry committee to assist the Spens Enquiry Commission. The Government of Orissa appointed a Sub-Inspector named Shri Basant Mishra to provide protection to Shri Biswanath Das during his visits to dangerous places as the president of our non-government organisation. As Biswanathbabu was out of Calcutta very often, this police officer used to stay with us most of the time. As the secretary of the committee, I was doing a lot of work. But Sri Hrudananda Mallick used to take a lot of strain in helping me to collect detailed information about the loss caused to Oriyas. We presented all these facts before the Spens Enquiry Commission. We went there to give a realistic picture of the way the Oriyas were murdered and the loss they had to suffer. I was making them understand by pointing at the blood stains in the room when Fazal Ali, member of the commission, looked at me and said, "So Mr. Routray you are practising at Cuttack." It was not exactly a question. It conveyed to me whatever idea he got from there. Perhaps he wanted to be sure about it. I have already said that we felt inferior in front of the legal advisors of other states. I simply nodded my head without speaking a word because had I introduced myself as a law student of that area, definitely credibility of my word would have suffered. I remembered this thing very clearly. When Justice Fazal Ali came to our state as Governor, I reminded him of this thing in course of my conversation. I was a Deputy Minister then. He showed interest

in knowing about that matter when I said that I had befooled him once by my acting. When I talked about my acting in front of the Enquiry Commission it generated a lot of laughter.

I have already mentioned that one police officer was appointed at our Oriya investigation office. The officer belonged to Angul. He was a tall man with fair complexion. He used to wear expensive garments and apparels. Hence, those who saw him thought that either he was a Superintendent of Police or an officer of some higher rank. As a result, wherever he went, the police officers of West Bengal paid him respect as they did to their own government officers. His impressive appearance helped us in many adverse situations. In Bengal, the Hindu Trading Company and other reknowned people could not easily get the co-operation from the police because of the Muslim League Government and the Chief Minister Surajourdi. Therefore, they felt very helpless. They felt relaxed when we met them along with Basantbabu and they wanted us to meet them repeatedly. The Allen Bury Company had its factory at Park Street. The area was full of Muslims. When one morning we went there, the employees of the company felt relaxed to see us along with the police. They requested us to visit there company every evening and helped us in providing a good jeep and enough fuel for our convenience in Calcutta. Curfew was imposed in Calcutta in the evening hours. The roads got empty. None of the vehicles could ply outside except the police jeep. There was no problem in driving the jeep as we had the police with us. I learnt driving there.

The riot stricken enquiry committee stayed at Bowbazar for some days. At times we hold our meeting there, where Biswanathbabu also joined. Sri Ranjit Gupt, Secretary, Home Dept. and Mr. Hindley, Secretary, Rehabilitation Department, both from the Government of West Bengal, visited our office and chatted with us. The office was in a small place. They realized the problems

arising in such a small place. Biswanath Das requested them to provide us with a house somewhere else. The house of a gentleman was lying abandoned in Shyambazar at Mohan Lal Street after he left it during the partition of our country. The Government of West Bengal permitted us to open our office and to help the Oriya students in the house on rent. Thereafter, our office was managed from there. After the office job came to an end, the space remained in the hands of Oriya students till 1981, in spite of circulating against it. We along with Biswanathbabu went to meet the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Sahid Surawardi, to inform him of the loss the Oriyas faced due to riots in Calcutta, what we did to help them and the problems we faced in this regard. On seeing Biswanathbabu, Mr. Surawardi expressed respect and listened to us with great compassion. I think that, as a result of his instructions, two officers came to our office and showed readiness to help us. While we were engaged in such kind of work, Sri E.B. Samuel, Asst. Secy., Home Deptartment, Government of Orissa, came to Calcutta for several times for inspection and presented his report to the Government of Orissa. He wrote in his report that the amount of rupees five hundred which was provided by the Government for managing the office was not sufficient in comparison to the work that was being done.

The Dream Comes True

Through our Oriya office we tried a lot to provide governmental support to the dead and the people who had suffered severe loss. Along with the list of casualties and the wounded, we had submitted our memorandum to the Bengal Governemnt recording the approximate damage and loss suffered by them and other Oriyas due to the unrest and demanded adequate compensation for the victims. They were happy enough to have our help. Hence some amount of money was collected to expand the organization among

the Oriyas in Calcutta. But our effort did not meet with success due to several problems. We hoped and desired to establish *Utkal Bhavan* in the city as a centre for social and cultural advancement for Oriyas. But we were left dejected as a result of the paucity of funds. Later, I came to know that whatever little funds were collected were spent for the social and cultural activities of the Oriyas. I had a great desire in my mind to build Utkal Bhawan at Calcutta to focus on the social and cultural aspects of the Oriyas. At that point of time, in many meetings I highlighted that Calcutta was home to four lakh Oriyas. If each of them donated a rupee each, it would be rupees four lakh and a big Bhavan can be built with it. But I realized that things could not be done by counting members only. I, therefore, tried to build Utkal Bhavan at Calcutta with the help of the Government of Orissa after becoming a minister. The ministers in our cabinet suggested that there was no need to establish Utkal Bhawan by the Governemnt, but I was stubborn. Sri Radhanath Rath was the Finance Minister then. He was very strict regarding the expenditure from the Governemnt treasury and at times it annoyed Nabab台u. There was a plan of buying a big land to build a house in Calcutta. The matter of buying a house, in case one was available in a good locality, was also considered. Shashi (Sri Shashi Bhusan Mishra), after being employed by Government of India, stayed at Deckers Lane near Esplanade. Often staying there, I, along with my friends, looked for a house or land in Central Calcutta. We got information about a good bungalow at Esplanade and a spacious plot of land at Ganesh Chandra Avenue and Mission Road but it was difficult to persuade Radhanathbabu in such an extravagant affair. At that time, I, with the help of Bengal Mnisiter Praful Chandra Sen, arranged to buy the place where the multi-storeyed Utkal Bhavan stands now. This is near the building of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray facing the Subodh Park on the Dharmatala Street along with a double-storeyed old building worth rupees one

lakh thirty-five thousand. Later, the bungalow was renovated and became Utkal Bhavan. Even that became possible because of my effort. I was very much satisfied to have Utkal Bhavan built at the centre of Calcutta by any means. It is a matter of rejoicing now that the Government of West Bengal has set up a bronze statue of Utkal Mani Pandit Gopabandhu Das in front of Utkal Bhawan.

Previously, I have highlighted a little on the job of Oriyas at the Calcutta Corporation. After interacting with them, I came to know that the people of Olaver under Aali Police Station in Orissa had monopolized the office. I was happy to see the harmony, affection and respect among them. Together they planned the development of their village. The people of Olaver, who are still working at Rourkela and other places, were influenced by this thought. In 1953-54, when Sri Nabakrushna Choudhary was the Chief Minister of the state, the people of Olaver established a hospital and invited both of us to inaugurate it. We were surprised and excited to see how they managed to build the hospital, appoint a doctor and a compounder and arrange medicines without any help from the government. Similarly, the establishment of the college at Olaver without any government help was remarkable. Staying far away from home, devoting his energies to mobilizing people was in fact exemplary. I came in contact with some of the distinguished Oriyas-Sarbashri Lala Narendranath Ray, Sachi Rout Ray, Rama Chandra Pattnaik, Hrudananda Nayak, Aakuli Mishra, Arpati Charan Mishra, Jagdish Pani, Umesh Chandra Nayak, Purna Chandra Lenka, Sarat Pattnaik, Kashinath Nayak, Rangadhar Biswal, Lect. Binayak Mishra and Lect. Kashinath Nayak- during my study of law and my holding of cultural, social and organizational activities among the Oriyas in Calcutta. Lala Narendarnath Ray was appointed as the liaison officer by the Government of Orissa and he opened his office near Bowbazar Street, worked and stayed there. Most of the time, I went to Calcutta to discuss the problems of the Oriyas with him.

He shared with me his previous experiences in Calcutta, gave me useful advice and encouraged me to take steps in order to deal with the problems of the Oriyas. In addition to these tasks my study of law was in full flow. These studies went on properly. According to the syllabus of Calcutta Law College, the lecturers engaged the students in moot court once in a week. The students were instructed to study a previously resolved lawsuit and prepare themselves as the prosecutor and defender in an interrogation process headed by a lecturer as the judge. I was very eager to participate in it. I studied for two years, appeared at examinations in the relevant subjects and received B.L. degree from the University of Calcutta in the first half of 1947.

The Wicked Motives of Bad People

The communal riot in Calcutta in its early stage was in a very terrible condition. Though it was under control, yet occasionally there were eruptions of violence at some places. There were some reported cases of stabbing at night, which resulted in deaths. Though there was no genuine ground for violence, the anti-social elements of both the communities caused disturbances for their own selfish ends. It was their profession to create an atmosphere of panic among people and collect money as the self-appointed protectors of the area. Rich and influential people who opposed them were harassed and threatened in many ways. I remember an experience of mine. When we were in Calcutta to help the Oriyas living there, we used to stay in the house of Madan Lal Jajodia that was situated near Chittaranjan Avenue at Vivekananda Square. One night in front of Madan Lal Jajodia's house we discovered a sack containing the body of a Muslim with multiple stab wounds. The police came, woke them up, interrogated them about various things and also suspected them of complicity in the murder. The family members

of Mr. Jajodia were extremely worried and informed us about it. The police officer who was with us informed the Head Quarters at Lal Bazar about this incident. After the inquiry, they found that some miscreants had done it with some evil motive. One evening on our way to Mr. Jajodia's house we were stopped by a group of seven to eight people who wanted to speak to us. They accused us of creating obstacles in their livelihood. They told us that the people of the area were sleeping a sound sleep as they kept a watch on the area, remaining awake throughout the night. They also told us that the people of that area gave them some money for the trouble they undertook. But Mr. Jajodia refused to pay anything. Hence, they troubled him by such means. But every time Mr. Jajodia escaped trouble because of our interference. Finally, they requested us not to extend any help to Mr. Jajodia after that.

We, faithfully, narrated the whole story to Mr. Jajodia. He talked with people who complained against him and extended all types of help and lived peacefully.

Most often a popular uprising takes a violent turn because of the ill motives and wicked behaviour of some people who try to take the full advantage of such volatile situations. That is how a movement based on non-violence and truth becomes violent. As a result, the innocent people suffer the most. My idea of politics and administration that developed from my experiences in those days in Calcutta was strengthened by the experiences that I gained later. That is why there is a great need for impartial politicians and administrators.

Smurti Anubhuti

Cuttack, Granthamandir, 1986

My Story: Many Stories
Kanduri Charan Das

Translated by Ashok Kumar Mohanty

Its name was Calcutta when I came to the city. Now it is known as Kolkata. The time was 1955-56. I am talking about that Calcutta. I had bought a half ticket and boarded the train. I was about 14 or 15 years of age and studying in class seven or eight. Father had expired two years earlier. Mother and two younger brothers were at home. This was our world. There were all kinds of problems at home after father passed away. We were farmers. Father had engaged several people to look after the farming. Everything was in a disarray after father passed away. There was a crisis in the family. Mother was terribly worried. I was forced to come to Calcutta to earn some money so that the family could be supported.

My brother-in-law was in Calcutta. Mother informed him of everything through a letter. He promised to take me to Calcutta and to help me. It was decided that I would go to Calcutta. Late Digambar Das, my brother-in-law, worked as the caretaker of a building owned by a British insurance company. He looked after the building. Hence, many Oriyas working in Calcutta had found shelter in that building. They worked at different places. They came to sleep there at night.

Let me tell you about my trip to Calcutta. I left home on an auspicious day with a well-wisher. He knew my brother-in-law and had assured my mother that I would reach Calcutta safely.

I accompanied the gentleman on the train after a half ticket was

bought for me. I was frightened out of my wits when the train ran into the station making a horrible noise. I wondered what that animal was. Sauntibhai was pulling me by my hand. I had been staring in amazement at the black smoke emitted by the train. The trains ran on steam those days. I was frightened. But Sauntibhai pulled me by my hand. I stumbled a few times but managed to walk alongside him. The train stopped at the station. He pulled me up by my hand. We sat down on wooden benches. The train let out a whistle and moved. The noise was frightening. I stared at Sauntibhai, fear writ large on my face. He reassured me that nothing would happen. One got used to the noise after making a few trips. I passed off to sleep on his lap.

There was quite a racket when the train reached Howrah. People jostled with one another to get down from the train. Sauntibhai held me by the hand and helped me to get down. We came out of the station. As I came out, I saw that water was coming out of a pipe in a jet on the road. I looked at Sauntibhai. He told me that the road was being washed. All roads were washed there in the morning. He told me that we did not have the time to look at such things since we still had to go a long way. There was a crowd wherever we went. We reached the bank of the Ganges. We had to cross the river to reach Calcutta.

We stood on the bank of the river. Many people had been waiting there for something.

Sauntibhai said, "This is a wooden bridge. We will cross the river on this bridge." The river was so wide that it was not possible to see the bank on the other side of the river. I saw the wooden bridge floating towards the bank. Sauntibhai said, "A ship is coming. Hence, the bridge has parted to left it through. People cannot cross over. The two halves of the bridge will close after the ship passes. We can cross over." I stood there with others and saw that something like a huge village was proceeding on its way. I was awestruck. The

village moved away to a distance gradually. People jostled with one another on the bridge too. We moved among them.

There was no suspension bridge then as there is now. There were no pillars anywhere. The bridge seemed to be hanging in space. Numerous vehicles were plying on it. The bridge was not affected in the least. The bridge was a mute witness to the success of science. It had been standing there for ages and singing paeans to science.

I reached Calcutta. But why did I come to Calcutta at such a young age leaving behind my studies and friends?

The name of my village was Khadithanta. The environment of the village was peaceful. A river flowed on one side. The boys of the village met on the bank of the river in the evenings. We got news of the jatras and other celebrations taking place in the neighbouring villages. We knew when to go to those places. Subscriptions were raised if there was a puja or a function in the near future. Festivities were also held near the village goddess. That was how things went on. Tears welled up in my eyes when I thought about those things sitting in distant Calcutta.

Sauntibhai took me to Digambar Bhai. Digambarbhai embraced me with affection when he saw me. We went up the stairs.

His living quarter was on the roof. One had to walk up seven floors. My feet were sore by the time I reached there. I found a divine person sitting there when I reached the place with a lot of difficulty. He got up and embraced me. I stared at Digambarbhai in amazement. He said, "Pay your respects to Sir."

The divine person is the late Dr. Kunjabihari Das. He was studying at Calcutta at the time. It was not possible on his part to take a house on rent. There was no other way for him to keep the body and soul together in an expensive city like Calcutta. He dined in Digambarbhai's mess and studied at the university.

There was a night school called Brajabandhu Naisha Vidyalaya.

The children of the labourers of Calcutta studied in that school. Kunjababu taught those children during the evenings.

I enrolled myself in that school. Classes were held from six in the evening till ten at night. There was a full-fledged library in that school. All magazines published in Oriya came to that library. Many old and new texts were also collected by the library. The students of the school had a chance to read all those books and magazines on paying a subscription of one rupee per month.

A meeting was held every Saturday in the school. The students read the poems, stories and essays written by them in that meeting. The teachers awarded marks to those essays. I always got the highest marks. Hence, I was encouraged to pen more and more write-ups. I developed the habit of writing stories and poems at that stage.

A children's magazine called *Jahnamamu* was being published from Cuttack under the editorship of Balakrishna Kar. Many essays suitable for the children were published in that magazine. Kunjababu wrote for that magazine. I too wanted to write for the magazine after going through a few issues. I sent a few pieces to the magazine at intervals. But they were never published. But my desire to write never waned. A daily named *Dainika Asha* was published from Cuttack. There was a section on literature on Sundays. The writings of many writers were published there. Once I had sent a story to the magazine. It was published the next Sunday. I cannot express how happy I was to see my story in print.

I may say that my life as a writer started after the publication of that first story. My interest to write increased to such an extent that I was more interested to write than to study. I was almost possessed by it. I got used to reading a lot of old magazines which I borrowed from the library. The school library turned me into a habitual dreamer. I sent a story every week to *Dainika Asha* and it was published. I was encouraged to write more and more. As a result, I got into the

habit of writing every day.

My life as a writer started thus. In the meantime, I got a job. It was arranged by my brother-in-law in his office. The salary was rupees110 per month. That would be equivalent to rupees 1500 today. The mess expenses came to around rupees fifteen a month. An anna or two was enough for tiffin. Four puris and curry were available for four paisa. Of course, that was available in our office canteen.

My work in the office was extremely light. I received the letters addressed to the company. The letters were opened three times in a day and sent to the respective departments after they were sorted. Our company was a foreign insurance company. It had several departments such as life, fire, marine, burglary, etc. The work was light. Hence, there was enough time to read and write in the office too. The working hours of the office were from ten to five. I had a wash after that and went straightaway to school.

All insurance companies were nationalised a few years later and I turned into a government servant. I found even more time in my hands then. I started writing books. Of course, I changed track. I found that no mystery stories or novels were being written in Oriya. But our young people were eager to read them. They read mystery novels written in English, Hindi and Bengali. I wanted to fill this void. I started writing. But what was the point of writing? Who would publish them? I went to the publishers at Cuttack with one or two manuscripts. They ridiculed me. They said, "Our godowns are full of books written by the famous authors of Orissa. No one buys them. And you've arrived with more manuscripts. We don't want to discourage you. Keep on writing. They would be published at the right time."

I lost hope. I returned. But some kind of stubbornness grew within me. I decided to publish my books somehow or other. I

did not know how to proceed in the beginning. Then I wondered about the idea of starting a printing press of my own. But that was not an easy task. A lot of money was needed. How could I take care of my family and start a press with a salary of rupees one hundred fifty per month? But the impossible became possible.

I'll talk about that later. Let me talk about something that had happened earlier. Once an Oriya literary meet was held at Calcutta. We had invited Kalindi Charan Panigrahy, Kunjabihari Das and other Oriya writers to the meet. It was mentioned at the meet that there was an absence of discussion on Oriya literature at Calcutta. One of us proposed that it would be nice if an Oriya magazine were to be published from Calcutta. Everyone supported the idea. Then there was a discussion on the name of the proposed magazine. Different names came up. But, finally, Kunjababu said that it should be named *Aasantakali*. It was supported by everyone. The meet came to an end and everyone left for home. Such resolutions were taken at all kinds of meetings and forgotten soon too. I too forgot all about it. Hrudananda Mallick came to me after a few days. He was into politics and took a leading role in Oriya movements in Calcutta. I knew him well. I accompanied him to various meetings. He used to stay in Utkal Bhavan in Shyambazar. Political leaders of Orissa often stayed there. Nilamani Rautray used to stay there too. Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab also used to stay there on his way to Delhi. Many discussions were held there on Orissa politics. Hrudananda Mallick organised all those meetings. Hence, Hrudananda Mallick was a familiar name among the Oriyas in Calcutta.

He told me one day, "I've decided that we will publish *Aasantakali* from this place." I supported him and said that we would all become famous in the literary field in that case.

He laughed and said, "It's up to us whether to be famous or

infamous. That'll come later. But we need to make preparations for publishing the magazine."

I said, "Very well. Tell me what can I do."

He said, "You've to be the editor of the magazine."

Editor? I was horrified. I said, "Hrudanandababu, you're joking."

"No. This is no joke. This is serious. I'll proceed if you agree to my proposal."

I said, "No, Hrudanandababu. Find a suitable person to be the editor. What do I know of literature? Only a few of my stories have been published in magazines."

He said, "That's enough. You are known in the literary circle. Can we appoint a non-literary politician to that post? He will do politics even here. Everything except literature will be discussed.

"Don't worry. We'll form an editorial board. I'll be on the board too. Don't disappoint me. I'll look after the monetary side. You have to take care of the editorial side."

The discussion came to an end that day. He told me that everything would fall into place once I made up my mind about shouldering the responsibility. I had to do my job as well as attend night school. I was not sure if I could devote enough time. This was a new path. There was an intense desire in me to move forward on the path of literature. But I was not sure if I could balance everything. However, a tide seemed to rise inside me for literature. Several characters floated before my mind's eye even when I worked at the office or walked on the streets. I kept on giving them shape on pen and paper. But I could not make them reach the readers. I was extremely pained. I made promises to myself. I would publish books anyhow. But how?

I recalled the publishers of Cuttack. They seemed to be making faces at me. No, I would throw down the gauntlet on them and publish my own books. I'll have my own press.

I confided about all these in a friend of mine and asked him for a loan. I borrowed rupees one thousand and five hundred from him and came to Cuttack. I went to the Manmohan Type Foundry and bought the letters. Computers were not in vogue those days. Letters were arranged manually to make formas. Formas of eight and sixteen pages were made and printing was done through machines.

I placed the order for the letters and came back. But a house was needed to put everything in place. I found that too. It was a small house where two wooden cases could be placed. I bought all other ancillary materials. The letters arrived after a fortnight. The work should have started after that. But it could not be started. Who was going to arrange the letters if a compositor was not available?

I found the right people after a great deal of trouble. As I was about to start work, Hrudanandababu arrived at my place. He told me that the declaration of the magazine had come from Delhi. The work had to be started then. The first work was to collect articles. It was decided that articles would be solicited through advertisement in a daily. It was also decided to collect articles from a few famous writers. Let the first issue come out. Everything would fall into place after that.

I raised the matter of the editorial board. He said that he had decided on two others. Ramachandra Harichandan was one of them. He was a highly educated person. He had no inclination towards politics. He worked with the Laxmi Insurance Company at Calcutta. I asked who the other person was.

He said, "He's your friend. Jadunath Dash Mohapatra."

I stared at him. He said, "You've this responsibility. You've written a short story book with him. *Two Flowers on a Stem*. He would agree if you ask him."

Jadunath Das Mohapatra was studying law at Calcutta at the time. He was staying in the hostel of the law college on the Hardinge Street. We were good friends. I went to his hostel at times. We talked about literature. We had published a book with four stories contributed by each. The title was *Two Flowers on a Stem.*

I requested him to be on the editorial board of *Aasantakali.* He agreed. An editorial board was formed with four members. A few articles reached us through advertisement in newspapers. We too collected a few articles. The first issue was published. It was priced at four annas. But distribution was a problem. There were problems in bringing out the second issue also. Money was the major problem. It took three months for the second issue of *Aasantakali* to be published. The third issue also came out. We ran out of money after that.

Ramachandra Harichandan from the editorial board did research on astrology. He was known to Patiram Parija.

Patiram Parija was the sole distributor of the Bengali daily *Ananda Bazar Patrika.* He was adept at promoting for wide circulation of magazines. He had the entire Bengali magazine market under his thumb. He was sympathetic towards Oriya literature. He had also taken the agency to sell Oriya newspapers in Calcutta. He was the owner of Konark Chemicals which produced an oil called the Konark Oil. He also had a press called the Konark Press.

Ramachandra Harichandan requested him to publish *Aasantakali* from his press. Patirambabu agreed. There were no further hindrances in the publication of *Aasantakali.* Ramachandra Harichandan added the astrology section to the magazine. That was the first time that an Oriya magazine had an astrology section. Many readers were attracted by it and bought the magazine. Patirambabu had an agency at Cuttack. The magazine could be sold easily through that agency. Aasantakali became a milestone in

the world of Oriya magazines. Many new writers came to the fore. Orissa had only one magazine called *Dagara*. Hence, there was no problem for the circulation of *Aasantakali*. The magazine became so popular in due course that the readers became restive if they did not get the magazine in the first week of the month.

But I was overworked. No other editor came to the office regularly. They came sometimes in the evenings to gossip. No one bothered about the printing of the magazine. No one helped me in selecting articles, sending them to the press for composition and proof reading. The work increased manifold when a special issue was to come out. I had to stay back in the night. I spread newspapers on the floor and slept. But I did not mind it in the least. It was sheer bliss to leaf through the pages when the magazine was finally published.

Aasantakali sustained itself. The writers of Orissa considered it to be a useful thing. I too was encouraged in the process. Several new articles created ripples in the minds of the people. I still remember a few lines from a heart-touching poem addressed to the editor.

Oh, dear editor of *Aasantakali*
You've published the poems of so many poets
You would again publish what I'm sending
Let Mother Kali of Calcutta help you in your endeavour.

Simple poems like these have graced the pages of *Aasantakali* over the years. The magazine served as a cradle for many new writers. They are great names in Oriya literature today. *Aasantakali* is going on. Let it go on forever.

Mo Katha: Kete Katha
Unpublished

Childhood Days in Calcutta

Panchanan Mohanty

Translated by
Priyadarshi Patnaik and Sachidananda Mohanty

In 1980, in the month of December, when my youngest son was leaving for Bangkok I had come along with him to Calcutta to see him off. That was when I visited my place of birth for the second time. There was no trace of the buildings in which I had spent my childhood. But on the way to Sahapur, I found the main gate still standing. I entered the gate and took rest under a very old *peepal* tree. I remembered the old days. I also rememberd Chandi, the calf, a lot, on that day. Father, mother, my teacher Bhagwan, Uncle Laxmikanta, all of them have left this world. Hemraj must also be dead. I have also crossed seventy years of age. The new house I had built has started crumbling. My children have grown up, grown wings and have flown away. They have built their own worlds. I am all alone among my memories.

What happened to Chandi and her world! She must have grown into a cow and have had her calves. Maybe someone sold her to the butcher or she died in someone's house and the municipality vehicle came to carry her body away. Her calf must have grown into a cow and given birth to another calf. They must all be dead now. But in the end, even now, there must be a calf somewhere. Would it also have a silver streak on its forehead! Thinking of these I had returned to the guest house.

I had read the black American writer Alex Hailey's *Roots* a long

time back. He had researched as to how his forefathers had been shipped from Africa to USA. The novel narrated this exodus. According to him, each individual has a primal desire to find out his roots: who am I? He tried to find that out and to explore the link with one's history. May be, while searching for "Who am I" one would discover one's real self and explore one's primal roots. And then he would realize the link between his own roots and the roots of everyone else. That would be a rare and unparalleled achievement indeed.

When was I born? I never could find this out from my parents. I have heard I was born in Calcutta. Since the day I gained awareness, I have heard my mother say that I was born on the full moon day of the month of *Kartik* (*Raas punnima*). She always celebrated that day as my birthday. How she calculated my age was known only to her or to my father. I never found out. Since my eleventh year, when my father passed away, I had been reared by mother. I have tried to ascertain the exact details of how long I stayed at Calcutta, or when I came back to our village. In the cycle of the world, in the midst of work, life rolled on. A life of struggle: who had the time to keep track of these things! I have heard I was about six or seven years of age when we came to the village. But I am not sure. The old people said many things. But they were not very particular about dates and calculations in those days. Things were done on the basis of approximations. When I came to the village I began my studies in the primary class. I remember our classes were held in the elephant stable of the local landlord, Dr. Mahatab. Living in such circumstances, I now cannot give an exact account of when I came back home or when my father died. Even now I am not sure. But after a long time I discovered a specific date, the date of my father's death – 17 December 1935, Tuesday (*Pousa* month, 8th day of the phase of the new moon). I never attempted to find my date of

birth. I also don't know what date my father gave to the school when I was admitted in the primary class. Later, when I read in middle school and then in high school, the date that was given by him in the transfer certificate came to be known to us. I appeared at my matriculation examination in February 1943. When I passed the examination, I saw my date of birth for the first time in the certificate from Patna University – December 6, 1924. That date is my official date of birth and is to be found in all official documents. I grew up, married and had children.

I remember going to Bhadrak for scholarship examination when I read in class three. Then I was around ten. Father accompanied me to Bhadrak. Before we left he had asked me to go to the houses of our neighbours to pay respect to the elders there and take their blessings. At Bhadrak the examination was held at Narayan Chandra Secondary English School. I remember having stayed in the students' hostel there. I also vividly remember how I gave my examination. But I did not win any scholarship. I believe I started my education at Feeder Primary school at Agarpara when I came to the village at around seven years of age. Hence I must have stayed at Calcutta for about six or seven years after my birth. What does one remember at such an age! Again, those playful childhood days passed very happily. There was hardly any pressure of studies since my education had not started in a systematic way. I read in a Bengali school at Calcutta. But since my father wanted that my education should be in Oriya, I was not able to study for long there. Teachers came to our house and that is how I studied after that. I remember a few things from those days.

I have heard of a spiritual experience that my parents had after my birth. It seems my parents had no children for about seven or eight years after marriage. In simple village ways, people blamed my mother for her supposed infertility and people avoided setting

their eyes on her face in the morning as it was considered inauspicious to do so. Hence, she used to get up when it was still dark and complete her morning chores before dawn. This stemmed from a blind belief. At that time my father was the chief mechanic of one of the sections of the traffic department of the Port Commissioner. He was very competent at repairing railway lines. He worked hard and the Bengali and the English officers were very happy with him. My parents used to worship Lord Tadekeswara Mahadev whose temple was pretty close to Calcutta. They must definitely have prayed for a child. A framed picture of His was there in our house. Later, when we came to the village, his photo was mounted on one of the walls. Other than the image of Shiva *linga*, a photograph of Shiva with a trident was also framed in glass and mounted. Every day, before his midday meal, father took a *bel* leaf in his mouth, prayed to the Lord and only then had his food. This he used to do till the end of his life. Perhaps the Lord was pleased. A son was born. But he died after a few months. My parents were heartbroken. They were devastated on losing this child whom they had got after such a long time. The wooden cradle made for this child is still in our village home today. Father had brought it back while leaving Calcutta. Let that be. Finally another son was born. In the month of *Kartika*, on the full moon day, I was born, my parents' second child. Perhaps in remembrance of Lord Shiva they named me Panchanan. But not forgetting the unfortunate incident that happened before, they called me Bhikari – the beggar, the unwanted one, the gift of God. For the same fear they called my younger brother Kangali (the needy one) instead of Sanatan. In this way my parents spent their entire lives in the worship of God. And the Lord's blessings always provided inspiration to our family.

In those days, in Calcutta, my father was very well-off. There were many people around to assist us. One person was constantly

there to carry me around. I was much pampered. I remember that a cowherd boy named Arjuna from the nearby village of Visaala Patta used to carry me around. He was more or less in my charge. I used to call him Uncle. A few days after coming to the village he died. But because of him our families were in touch with one another for a long time. His elder brother, Hari, visited our house. I also went to their house once in a while. All these were after my father's death in the village. Our relation went back to our Calcutta days.

Father always tried to provide all the amenities of life to us. He was a man of the village. But then he stayed in Calcutta and interacted with many white and Bengali sahibs. Sometimes he took us to their bungalows with him. I used to be a very cute and healthy child and was not afraid of anyone. I interacted freely with everyone and conversed in Hindi and Bengali. Father used to buy us readymade clothes. In winter he used to get us costly clothes and overcoats. Socks and shoes were also bought. I remember seeing many such dresses later when we went to our village. I have observed that one of my coats had a rather stiff sleeve – I perhaps used it regularly to wipe my nose.

Let me now pen down what I remember of our first house at Calcutta. I was born at Sahapur in the Khidirpur Area of Calcutta. I have already mentioned that my father worked for the Port Commissioner's section. For the railway maintenance work of the Commissioner, iron tracks, wooden slippers and other essentials were stocked there. When required, these were transported from there. There was an officer-in-charge of that store who stayed within its compound. My father, as the head mechanic, also stayed within the same compound. We had been provided a house. A few other employees also lived there. In this way it had grown into a store colony. In order to reach that place, one had to take the road from

Howrah to Garden Reach. The Chief Engineer's office where my father worked was located at 51, Garden Reach Road. I still remember that number and that road. That was the dock area. Ships used to come here to unload goods and to repair. Parts of the dock were cleared of water for cleaning. Hence it was known as dry dock. First one had to cross the bridge to reach Khidirpur dock. It was a floating bridge. When ships came, it could be pulled up from both the banks. Later the two ends could be pulled down to make a bridge. Vehicles could travel again. Beyond the bridge was a gate. One had to enter through it. On the right was another gate with an arch on which was written in English 'B. N'. When I visited Calcutta in 1980, I saw those two gates again. But the arch no longer carried the initials B. N. When one went by that road, one could see the dock water on the left. Beyond were the railway tracks. These tracks were used day and night to carry cargo into the mainland. On the west of the tracks was a huge godown where things were stored.

As you entered that area, you could see the corrugated iron door to our house. But the road to the house was more convoluted: store house, smithy, a few residential houses, a field and then a drain. If you crossed the wooden bridge over the drain, on the right was the engineer's house and on the left was our's. The drain separated these two houses from the other buildings. Our house was like a *khanja* (block). The fencing was done with wooden strips used on the rail tracks and with iron sheets. The roof of the house was also made of such sheets. When you entered the house, the first thing that you could see was an iron water tank and a water trough. Once a day, the water supplied by the corporation was used to fill them up. The reason for the extra water reserve was household cleaning of clothes and the cattle that also stayed there. On the left was a cowshed and at the end was the toilet. In those

days cleaners were there to clean the toilets. A metal bucket was used as the pot and kept below the toilet. To the right was our living quarters.

We had around ten or fifteen cows in the stable. A cowherd from Bihar took care of them. He used to clean the stable and feed hay to the cows and other stuff. When he cut the hay to bits and mixed these with the chaff of grains and the residual water of cooked rice and prepared their food, I would sit there and watch him. At any point of time, at least five or six cows were ready for milking. When they dried up some others were ready. In this way we had milk round the year. The surplus milk was sold to regular clients. All this was taken care of by the cowherd. I remember the milk-giving cows always did not have their calves with them. Sometimes one or two of them died. While milking, the calves were kept apart from their mothers. Everyday morning and afternoon, five minutes before milking, the calves were allowed near their mothers' one after the other. When they pushed at their mothers' udders in joy and started sucking, milk automatically flowed to the nipples. What wonderful ways of God! But exactly at that moment, the calves were separated from their mothers and the milk was extracted for human beings. For some time the cows and calves became restless. But what was the way out! They could only look with pleading eyes at one another. In this way, due to the harassment of the cowherd, some tender calves died of lack of nourishment. This was usually practiced more on the male calves as they had no future in milk business. Even if the calf dies early, one still has to extract milk from the cow. So, the skin of the dead calf was removed, covered over a straw frame roughly made in the shape of a calf and the mother cow was deceived with it everyday to provide milk. The cow licked the dummy calf and felt satisfied. After milking, the cowherd took the cows and the calves out to the

field for some time. This was the routine. In those days, there were many empty fields nearby. The calves used to jump around in joy. Out of habit they sucked at their mother's udders. But there was hardly any milk to be extracted. Before midday, after returning to the stable, the cows and the calves were kept apart till the evening.

In the house, there were three rooms, a kitchen and a big verandah. There was a big courtyard at the center. The roof was of corrugated iron. In one of those rooms lived a cousin of mine (my father's elder brother's son). His name was Madhusudan. He has passed away a long time back. In those days he was a patriot and an idealistic young man. In the walls of his room hung pictures of Mahatma Gandhi, Jatin Das, C. R. Das and other national heroes. Later, we brought these frames to the village and I remember them hanging from the earthen walls there for a long time. In that room, at one corner, a small symbolic hut had been made of a lump of clay and sea shells. I have heard from my mother that that was where I was born and that on the sixth day a puja was performed. I remember, sometimes, towards the later part of the afternoon, thunderstorm came with lightning and rain. The rain tapped loudly on the iron sheet. The roof swung with the wind and I was afraid. Clinging to the pillow, I shut the door, put my face into the bed and lie tightly on my brother's cot and shut my ears with my fingers. When I removed my fingers from the ears, the roar of the storm barged in. When lightning flashed, in order not to hear the roar of the thunder, I shut my ears tightly with my hands and lay quietly with my eyes shut. Slowly the rain subsided. I opened the window a bit and peeped outside still lying on the bed. Water still trickled down the roof on to the wooden beams at the end. From there they fell drop by drop. Outside, because of the sun the drops sparkled like glass beads. But then they were not able to stay in that position for long and dropped down. Again new drops formed.

After sometime, when the water was exhausted, this stopped. I looked at all these, my head slightly raised from my pillow. But I usually worried about my father during thunderstorms: where would he be then? How would he come back home? Mother later assured me that my father was definitely in the office since he did office work in the afternoons.

In the afternoons, my father took rest in the bedroom and I slept near him. But generally I did not feel very sleepy. Yet I could not go outside. I lay quietly and looked at the kitchen garden. A small bird with a red beak had made a nest of sticks and straws on one of the trees. It hopped here and there playfully and sometimes even came into the house. I often felt like rushing out and grabbing the beautiful bird and putting it inside the cage. But then I could not go out. My father slept next to me! Just beyond our backyard, there was a shallow area which held some water. Maybe that was the spot from where earth had been dug to construct the house. Beyond the trough was a big field. During rainy nights, the croaking of frogs from that trough could be heard distinctly. Frightened, I used to rush into my mother's lap. She had once told me that such frogs, which lived in water and made such croaking sounds, were known as *brahmani* frogs (sic). But another species of frog lived in the cracks of trees. These were the hardy species. There was yet another kind of frog – very small – which lived near the water and rushed into it at the slightest sound. I still remember those words of my mother.

When we stayed at that place I noticed that father got up very early in the morning. I also observed him go to the toilet with a 'bidi' in his mouth. Mother used to tell me that he did that to counter the smell of the toilet. I never saw him smoke at any other time. After a bath he sat for breakfast. Mother made flat cakes of fermented rice flour and served them hot. I was there beside him

and had a few cakes. I remember my father having about a litre of milk and some sugar along with this. At around 9 o'clock in the morning, father went to work. My mother was busy with household chores and I was asked to study. When father was around I read or wrote something for him. In those days, at Calcutta, I was taught at home. True, I went to a Bengali school for a few days. But then teachers used to come home. They were employees of my father's office. One used to teach English and the other Oriya. I remember reading Oriya in the traditional way. I read *My First Book* to learn English. Even now I remember some of the words and sentences of the book. Till the age of seven, till I stayed at Calcutta, this was the way I was taught. The Oriya teacher's name was Bhagwan. He was from our village. Father had helped him get the job. During the festival of goddess Saraswati, he took me along with him to other Oriya colonies seeking alms. This was the convention. I went along with him with a cane and a small flag in hand. I had learnt a few Oriya prayers addressed to goddess Saraswati from the Oriya study book. In front of the people I recited them. People greeted us, welcomed us to their houses and offered food. Whatever they offered belonged to my teacher Bhagwan. In those days, this was the guru-sishya tradition. No one at home objected to this. But when I reflect on it today, I feel as if I was a monkey dancing to the tune of its master.

Now I can not really guess what kind of education my father had in mind for me. I do not think he was planning to come back to the village at that time. After staying there for such a long time, perhaps he had got attached to the place. But then, he had a lot of love for Orissa and the Oriya language. He must have been in terrible conflict, for he never wanted to leave his job and go back to the village. When one is in the city and is doing a good job, a number of facilities are available to him. If one knew English, it always

helped in life. Perhaps that was why he emphasized English education for me. Again, he had love for Oriya as well. Perhaps he thought that when I grew up, he would find a suitable job for me in the company with the help of his bosses. In those days, such things were pretty common. Almost all parents doing jobs in foreign land had such wishes – to be able to plant a seed of their own in their workplaces. Sometimes, the attachment to the place and even the house was so deep that they thought that if their children got jobs there, they would be able to stay in the same place even after retirement. When I think about it today, I feel my father also faced a similar dilemma. Whatever it might be, under some terrible circumstances, his choice was made for him. All of a sudden, the journey of life for our family took a different turn. But I will talk about it later. While talking about my studies at Calcutta, I have rambled on about so many other things.

After my father went to work, I often slipped out of our iron gate along with the cowherd when he took the cattle out to the field. My mother often did not even know about it. When I wandered with the cattle I felt as if I had managed to escape from prison. I threw stones into the pond in the field or chased frogs. When they rushed into the water together, I was delighted. I tried to get into the pond to pluck water lilies but the cowherd did not allow me. Then I started chasing the butterflies but failed at the task. I hugged the calves and caressed them and fed them tender grass. But they usually did not let me catch them, rubbed their bodies against mine and ran away. When the cowherd was around, I often approached the calves but never the cows. Sometimes I went up to the railway tracks to the north of the field. There was a small railway station. It was called Sonaadingi. All around, as far as one could see, there were villages. In those days our house was almost on the outskirts of the city.

Father usually returned home around 1 o'clock in the afternoon. I had to come back before him to sit down with my books. The Iron Gate was usually kept shut. I called my mother loudly. But she acted as if she could not hear me. Then I made a ruckus banging on the gate. Mother came out acting as if she was angry. But she never thrashed me. I acted as if nothing had happened and sat down with my books. Mother had told my father about my pranks once or twice and I had got a terrible thrashing. Since then my mother never told my father about my outings. Perhaps she could not see me suffer. Later, I sat at meal with my father like a good boy and he was full of praise for me.

Our neighbouring store officer was Bengali. Everyone called him Badababu. He was as fat as his wife was thin. They had two sons – Bhupati and Pasupati. Bhupati was the elder son and was studying for his medical degree. I sometimes saw him doing workout on their front verandah. The younger son was not interested in studies. He spent his time wandering about with us. Sometimes we made small houses of broken bricks and played with them. On occasions I went to their house. Their mother gave me sweet candy and water.

In the store compound, wooden slippers used on railway tracks were stacked and kept. Finding a safe place below the stacks, bitches often gave birth to a litter of pups. Sometimes I got a clue to their whereabouts and tried to catch them. Their mother got angry and came and bite me. I went back home wailing and banged on the front door. Mother came out running. She worried about the wound and took me to our neighbour's house. Bhupati's mother gave some medicine. I remember it tasted sweet and sticky like jaggery. I came back home with mother. A man named Hemaraaj from Vilaashpur district used to assist my mother. When he heared about it, he was not satisfied. He took me to the slum of the Bihari people. A witch

doctor lived there who could cure dog poison. He examined my wound and covered it with a *peepal* leaf and put some inflammable herbs on it. Then he brought a red hot iron and slowly passed it over the herb. Then he chanted some spells. The wound felt hot. The herbs burnt and released smoke. Then he said that the poison had been countered. We went back home. When father came home, mother kept quiet until food was served. She perhaps knew how furious father would be. Then she told him. Usually I had to hear a lot of reprimand. Occasionally he even slapped me. In a few days, I forgot everything and started repeating my pranks in the midst of my friends. Sometimes I indulged in other kinds of mischief as well. Father often brought me mechanical toy cars. After playing with them once or twice, I smashed them with a wooden stick to find out how the mechanism worked. Again I was rebuked. "For days, no more new toys!" In this way I got so engrossed with breaking things that I forgot food and sleep. Mother used to say, "You will grow up to be an engineer!"

One day I was hitting at something with an iron kitchen utensil. Mother was worried that I might accidentally injure myself and so pulled it from my hands. I also did not let go and pulled back. As a result the sharp iron plunged into the flesh just above my right eye. Father heard about it. I was taken to the hospital. The wound was bandaged. I went around telling everyone that my mother had hurt me. By God's grace my eye was not damaged. Since then I carry a mark over my right eye. It figures in official identification papers and in my passport as well.

Below the *peepal* tree, at the entrance of the store compound, was a smithy. It belonged to the Port Commission Division. Small iron parts needed for the construction of railway lines were made there. In those days, very advanced materials were not used for railway lines. There was a furnace for beating the iron into shape. It

was fed with coal. Since it was impossible to blow the red hot coal with air manually, leather bellows were used to supply air. If one pulled at a rope that activated the mechanism, air flowed into the furnace. A layer of fire inside the furnace glowed red and flared up. When one let go of the rope, the intensity of heat again subsided. Through an iron pipe connecting the furnace to the bellows, air flowed in. That inflamed the fire, for the air blew into the hot coal. Iron pieces were buried into the red hot coal till they became red and then they were taken out, beaten with an iron hammer and given various shapes. Red hot and malleable iron could be moulded easily. Later they were immersed in water to cool them down. I watched this process sitting at some corner. But I was never allowed near the furnace. The workers there knew me well and loved me. I had gone there for the annual Viswakarma Puja many times. I even had *prashad* or the offering to Lord Viswakarma. On Sundays the smithy was closed. People lay down under the tree and enjoyed the cool breeze. I also sat there on Sundays on many occasions.

Rainy season. First shower! I remember how father went to the countryside to catch fish. His preparations included a lantern, an umbrella and a heavy crescent-shaped knife (*katuri*). The fish came out at the touch of fresh water in the nearby streams. After a year of captivity in stagnant water they rushed out with the flow of fresh water and thrashed about in the fields full of water. Then father hit them with the heavy knife and caught them. I saw him bring home typical freshwater fish on many occasions. But until he was back I was worried. It was like an addiction for my father. He enjoyed it a lot.

I have already said that there was a stream near the house. During rains, water flooded into it from many small rivulets. Our household people caught fish during the rainy seasons by setting a net at the mouth of one such rivulet. Usually one caught very small fish with

these. At home, we had a small brass frying pan. Mother cleaned the fish and fried them in it. When she was away I picked up a fish and moved around the house nibbling at it. Mother got angry but who listened to her!

I remember many such small things. Although we had milch-cows, I did not like milk. Mother threatened me that my teacher would get angry and make me drink it.

Some days, while wandering around, I went quite far from the store area. With other boys I played with tops on the road. I used to carry a top and a winding thread in my pocket. On the side of the road were a few shops. One of them belonged to a man from Jajpur area of Orissa. He knew our family. On occasions mother sent me to buy something from his shop. He knew me. Sometimes I gave my mother's reference and got a bottle of soda from his shop. Once, after having soda I smashed the bottle against the railway track, took out the glass ball inside and played with it. While calculating what we owed to the shop, mother came to know of this soda bottle episode. I narrated everything truthfully. On hearing about the incident of the smashed bottle, mother was irritated and said, "I could have got you some playing marbles from the shop! Why did you do such a thing?" She failed to realize that I did it out of curiosity. Then I was able to understand neither how the glass ball could go in through the tight mouth of the bottle nor how it could act as a stopper after the bottle was filled with soda water. Why did the glass ball go down if pushed with a stiff finger or stick? How did the soda come up? I was perhaps curious about all these and hence smashed the bottle. But I failed to comprehend anything and so picked up the undamaged glass ball to play with it.

Sometimes, while wandering, I went near the dock. People loaded coal on the ship. Coal dust flew everywhere. Faces and clothes were black with coal. Some used hammocks to paint the

ship's sides while others did repairs to it. At the sound of the siren at 12 noon, everyone stopped work at lunch time. In the shop nearby all kinds of ground grains were available. They were heaped neatly inside containers in a tapering conical shape and inside were green chilly. People bought these, soaked them with their dhoti end under the government water tap and then eat it. Then they drank water from the tap and also washed the cloth end with it. The cloth dried on their body. After a few minutes' rest under a tree or a railway carriage, work resumed. When I knew it was noon, I hurried back home.

In those days people preferred going to the theatre. When father came to know of it, he sometimes took us out. I remember, father once took us to the Minerva theatre. A play called *The Disappearance of Sita into the Earth* was being staged there. At the end, the earth parted and Sita disappeared into it. Lord Rama and others could only gape at the spectacle in shock. Many in the audience burst into tears. I could not also stop myself from crying.

Those were the days of silent movies. There were images only. Father once took us there. On seeing such images, I got frightened and buried my face in my mother's lap. That day my parents could not stay till the movie ended and had to hurry back home.

It was the month of *Kartik*, the cold holy month. People took bath early in the morning. Father also hired a carriage and took us to the bank of river Ganga for an early morning holy dip. We came back shivering after the cold bath.

Usually, in the morning, we had puffed rice and jaggery. I roamed around and ate it. Sometimes we had rice cakes or bread baked the night before with milk. Since our area was in the outskirts of the city, many vegetable and fruit vendors from the nearby villages came there. Mother bought large ripe bananas. Sometimes she also bought us country berries.

But then, suddenly something happened which broke this daily routine. I have already hinted at this before. I noticed that father was not going to work anymore. Sometimes he was going out on some other work. Mother told me that there was some 'case' going on. Father had been asked not to work. I noticed that no one came to our house except Hemaraj. Every year Saraswati *puja* was celebrated with a lot of pomp. People in the Sahapur area also joined the fest and food was served to everyone. That year nothing happened. I usually found my parent worried. One day a man came and took away our cattle. Mother stood at the door and cried quietly. Father went inside. The cowshed stood empty. Then, on a fateful day, mother said, "We are going back to the village. Father has lost his job." How things were packed, how we traveled, how we reached the village? I do not remember any of these. I only remember an early morning when along with my parents, my brother and sister I got down from the train at Bhadrak station in Orissa. In those days, there were only a few thatched houses at Bhadrak station and no rush of cars and buses like today. This was approximately in the year 1931-32. This is how my childhood at Calcutta came to an abrupt end. But I went to Calcutta again for month or so. But before I talk about that let me tell you about what I heard from my mother about my father losing his job.

When one is in a high position, people are envious. Sometimes, using one's influence and by getting instigated by others, one makes mistakes: attempts to earn a little money in unjust ways. Subordinates may also get attracted to the position. They may get restless when a person does not retire early and the position is not available. As a result they may plot a scheme and accuse the said person. The aim always is – how to bring about the fall of that person, remove him from his job and grab it. Such a thing happened with my father. The division which he was heading was full of illiterate or partly

literate people. It was easy to influence such people. The person who instigated them all was another senior employee of the division who expected to get my father's position after him. But he was impatient and wanted to defame my father and remove him from his position. He influenced the workers and complained to the senior officials. Some sort of union was formed against him. That individual was a relative from our village for whom father had got a job. Because of his accusation, my father was suspended and an inquiry was held. This took time. Father had to run the family with a limited allowance. As a consequence, our family had to face a lot of financial difficulties. At the end, the verdict was communicated. Father lost his job as well as pension. But strangely enough, as a result of that enquiry, the person who had accused my father also lost his job. Strange is justice! He also had to return to the village. He was a distantly related uncle known as Mukunda Charana.

After losing his job, father had no alternatives. It was not possible to stay at Calcutta any longer. He had competence for no other kind of work. Again, the way he lost his job made it almost impossible for him to get another. So he decided to go back. During his tenure at Calcutta he had neglected his village. But then suddenly he was forced to go back. It was definitely a disaster which shattered everything. It brought deep pain to me in my childhood. Due to lack of money, a few valuables had to be sold. Preparations were made to go to the village. As I mentioned earlier, the cattle were also sold off.

Now, in my old age, when I reflect on those days without any regret, I realize that a lot of ups and downs came in my life after that. I have gained a lot of experience from them. But today it seems that what looked like a disaster at that time was not actually one. If it had not happened, then how could I have been what I am now! How could I have got an opportunity to lead a spiritually-

oriented life! Hence, behind everything there is God's will. Through diverse circumstances and experiences, man progresses in life and finally reaches the goal ordained by God. In this way I had to leave Calcutta at a very early age. But I had to go back again in a year or two. This time I went with my father and stayed at Calcutta for about one and a half month for my treatment.

I could not adjust to the climate in the village. I suffered a lot from malaria. Treatment by the country doctor was of no avail. In those days there were no allopathic doctors in the area. Father had stayed at Calcutta for a long time. We had all been under the treatment of the doctor of the Port Commissioner. Hence, he had little faith in any other treatment. He went back with me to Calcutta and arranged for my treatment there. A cousin known as Madhu used to stay with us when we were at Calcutta. But it was felt that it would be more convenient to stay a little distance away with my uncle Laxmikanta. He and his family took a lot of care of us. We sometimes came to meet my cousin in the old house. Our old employee, Hemaraj, also visited us there. He pulled me close to him affectionately. I also went to him like a tame kitten. "Look at the little master! How he has lost weight! But this is the place where he was born. The medicine will definitely work here." Hemraj said. I had also visited our neighbors and acquaintances. I still did not recover. So father asked me not to strain myself. Hemraj used to be always at my side. One day I went to his house – A one room tin-roofed house. He stayed alone. At the back, there was a small shed of tin. Below it there was a small calf. I remembered our cows on seeing it. I went to it. On seeing me it twisted its head from side to side and moved restlessly. I mustered courage, approached it, and caressed its head and neck. It raised its neck for a tickle. Its colour was red. There was a silver mark on its forehead. Once we also had such a calf. The cowherd called it Chandi and

loved it because it was a female calf. When we left for village, along with the other cows, she was also sold off. That day flashed before my eyes – My parents' tears did not stop as they were herded off. It was all so recent! On seeing Hemraaj's calf, all those memories flashed before my eyes. I was drawn to the calf. When I went to my cousin's place I also visited Hemraaj and his calf. We built up a friendship. On seeing me, it extended its neck to lick my hand. It could understand everything, although it was unable to speak. When I prepared to leave, it pulled at its rope to go along with me – Call out. I went back to it. But then I had to return when Hemraaj said it was time.

I remember, when I stayed at uncle's house, I used to go fishing at the dock. The traditional way of making a fishing rod, using bamboo, line, a piece of light float and a hook was not prevalent in those regions. A number of hooks were attached to the end of a reel of fishing line. The hooks were of different sizes. The baits were threaded onto the hooks and then the entire thing was thrown into water. When a fish took the bait, one could see movement in the line and then we pulled the line in. This is how I tried to fish. But I do not remember if I ever succeeded.

The time for return to village arrived. We took leave of my uncle and came to my cousin's house. Father packed things. Hemraj assisted him. I put on my clothes. Then I rushed to Hemraaj's thatch. It was close by. I felt like meeting Chandi one last time. Perhaps I would never see her again. As I caressed her I forgot how time passed. Father sent Hemraaj in search of me. Hermraj, after a futile search elsewhere, came home and saw me there. When he said that it was time to go and father was getting worried, I was forced to leave. Chandi looked at me. I kept turning back to look at Chandi. Soon she disappeared from sight. Hemraj held me by my hand and took me to my father. It was farewell time – perhaps that is

why father was not annoyed. I left with my father. Hemraaj came up to the main entrance of the store to see us off. At the time of parting, he came to me and said, "Little Master, send my greetings to the Mistress. Also tell her that I have kept the calf with great care. You have seen everything. Tell her about it. Also ask her to come once." Then I thought, "Was it the same Chandi whom we had bidden farewell so many months back? Was she able to recognize me after such a long time! Back in the village I told mother everything. She told me that before selling off the herd, she sought father's permission to gift Chandi to Hemraj. He had served us for so long! So mother had gifted him the calf.

I had read the black American writer Alex Hailey's *Roots* a long time back. He had researched how his forefathers had been shipped from Africa to USA. The novel narrated this exodus. According to him each individual has a primal desire to find out about his roots. That is, "Who am I?" — To find that out and to explore the link with one's history. May be, while searching for "who am I" one would discover one's real self and explore one's primal root. And then he would realize the link between his own roots and the roots of everyone else's. That would be a rare and unparalleled achievement.

May be because of such an urge I have been keen on exploring my early history. Perhaps, that is why I had gone to that ancient place in 1980. Such an exploration is definitely beyond the imagination of a calf like Chandi or anyone else in her lineage. Let that be. But what is the purpose of searching for such mysteries? The answer to that mystery of mysteries is that this is the manifestation of one of the ways of the Almighty. He is in everything and is present everywhere. If one recognizes him, one finds the source of all mysteries. Searching for anything else would feel redundant and unnecessary. But is it so easy!?

Life as an Employee in Kolkata

Golak Chandra Pradhan

Translated by Nibedita Sahu

I joined the Calcutta office in the month of October, 1957. After staying in the R.M.S guest house for one week, I arranged my lodging in the Government quarters of one of my co-workers' elder brother. He was a very affectionate person. He served in the defense factory. His village was adjacent to Jajpur town. The quarters consisted of two rooms. It was on the ground floor of a three-storeyed building near the crossing of Lake Valley road of Baligunj and Raja Basant Ray Road. Dhakuria Lake was very close to it. The area was known for its hygienic and beautiful environment. My co-worker's brother lived there with his wife, a son and two daughters. I had to manage with his young brother cum my co-worker in one room. I also has my meal at their place. Although I lived with them as a paying guest, two brothers treated me as their fifth brother. Their children called me their 'new uncle'. At that time, our office was in Big Bazaar and our departmental work was scheduled in Madras Mail or Bombay Mail. We had to work in the Calcutta office on the next day, returning by train, in order to know whether there was any special order and to take salary or extra allowances etc. Officers working in Madras Mail got four days and five nights' rest in Calcutta whereas the staff of Bombay mail were allowed five days and four nights only. We regaled ourselves by visiting the Calcutta city during leisure hours. The leisure hours were beguiled into visiting the Calcutta city, watching various games being played and reading books. At that time there was a good library in

Sashibhusan De Street near Bowbazar for the local Oriya people. I frequented that library and read some books by a renowned Bengali writer. Gradually I was proficient in reading, speaking and writing Bengali. Down below, kids played in the small playground in front of the building. They wanted to play with me when I sat on the verandah in front of my room. Within a few days they became my friends. Even they had begun to disturb me when I wanted to take rest in my room after two days of night duty in the train. Then it dawned on me that an atmosphere of solitude and a single room was the need of the hour. I shared my sentiments with some Oriya betel shopkeepers. Finally, I found my place. The rental of the house was rupees thirty. Situated in pleasant surroundings, Jajbadi was at the crossroads of Lake Valley road and Rashabehari Avenue. This became my next home. Meanwhile, a strong intimacy developed between the family of those brothers with whom I stayed and me. Gathering courage, I tried to convince them about my aim in life. I entered my new house in the month of February, 1959. Even then, I continued to take my meals with my former friends. Not to have done so would have hurt them. Needless to say, I considered them as my own elder brothers and sisters-in-law. Within a few days, the landlord's eldest son became my friend, philosopher and guide. He was a Cost Accountant, handsome in looks and bad in behaviour. They were three brothers and three sisters. Being the first of his parents, he was a retired doctor and his mother was goddess-like in her ways. When I called her aunt, she replied, "You were my son in previous birth. So call me mother." From that day, I called her "Ma". Again one day she told me, "You have tremendous good luck. You have one mother in Calcutta and another in your village." I lived in the Sector 'A' of the four-storeyed building. The younger uncle of that friend lived in Sector B- He was a High Court judge. Another uncle who was an Executive Engineer lived in Sector C. Everyone loved me dearly. The younger brothers and sisters used

to call my friend 'Dadabhai'. Eventually, I also called him 'Dadabhai'.

Since Dadabhai was a Cost Accountant and served in a British company, he was associated with some reputed families of Bengal. Sometimes during holidays, he took me with him and I was always introduced as his younger brother. He always paid our bills when we ate in restaurants. If I ever wanted to pay, he joked, "You are only a clerk and how can you pay these bills?" I informed him that I was pursuing higher studies. He recommended to me the names of two colleges in south Calcutta where science was taught. These two colleges were Charuchandra College and Asutosh College. I met the principals of both the colleges and expressed my desire to study. After knowing about the conditions under which I worked in railways, they very politely advised me not to take science as the subject. Since I would not be able to attend practical classes, it would naturally be difficult for me to sit for the examination. Hence, my dream of becoming a doctor was shattered. Meanwhile, I tried to know about the developed standards of education, culture, art, sculpture and social reforms in Bengal. Nineteenth-century Bengal saw many stalwarts like Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chattopadhyay, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Vivekananda, Jamini Ray and Michael Madhusudhan Dutt. That is why Bengal is highly advanced in the fields of literature, history, music, religion, sculpture, social studies and social sciences. I described my difficulties with regard to studying science in college to Dadabhai. He suggested that I study commerce instead. Then I could study Costing or Chartered Accountancy afterwards.

As suggested by him, I studied in the evening session of the city college (Gol Park Branch) in 1959. At that time, I worked in Bombay mail. So it was not possible for me to attend around ten evening classes. During that time, Oriya was not an approved subject in Calcutta University. So I took English as my language subject.

But Calcutta University approved Oriya only three months before the Pre-University final examination. So I was compelled to opt for Oriya instead of English. I did not know the books to be read to cover the syllabus for Oriya. I came to know from an unconfirmed source that 'Tapaswani' (Gangadhar Meher) was included in the syllabus for Oriya. So I got 'Tapaswani' from the library and read it twice all through. Somehow I had an idea that there were 40 marks in grammar and I could certainly get 30 marks out of it. The Pre-University test was held. I had done well in almost all subjects except Oriya. After seeing the question paper for Oriya I came to know that 'Tapaswani' was not in the course. I was able to attempt only the essay which had 30 marks. When the result was published, I passed in second division. Besides Oriya, I had first division marks in all other subjects. I secured 18 out of 100 in Oriya. After revaluation, it was increased to 25 with grace marks of 7. Though one was required to secure 60 marks in English and Oriya taken together in order to pass, a minimum of 25 was required for passing each individual subject. I often thought that I could have passed in first division if 11 marks instead of 7 were given me in Oriya on revaluation.

I got admitted in the day session of City College for the three-year degree course. I made some good friends there. So there was no problem to manage proxy for meal and tiffin in the hotel and to meet the study expenses. I was unable to send money home from my salary. Just like higher education was my dream for success, to take care of my family affairs was my life's vocation. Despite a great deal of discomfort, I gave private tuitions to pupils. As a result, my financial situation improved but the pressure of work increased with each passing day.

Autobiography of Golak Chandra Pradhan
Unpublished

To Calcutta
Lakshmana Mishra

Translated by Ashok Kumar Mohanty

Naran learnt to read and write Bengali after considerable effort. Prodded by Badal, he even shed his inhibitions about speaking a bit of Bengali. I had not expected that the young teacher could make his pupil so proficient so fast. In any case whatever happened was beyond expectation. I was not able to express my sincere gratitude to him at that time. I express it today from a great distance. Will it reach him?

One afternoon, I was sitting all by myself on the verandah and brushing up my Bengali. The children were not at home. The uncles were busy in their work outside. The aunties were busy preparing dinner. I was practising writing in Bengali. I got bored after a while and started drawing a picture. I had the habit of drawing pictures and sculpting images since my childhood. My eldest aunty in the village had all along encouraged me to pursue such things. I used to draw pictures for my friends in the village school on request. At that time, the sun, beyond the dense bushes, was in a hurry to turn crimson. I had also grown restless. Still I had kept on drawing the picture. Suddenly, I had a feeling that I was being watched. I turned back. There was indeed a boy of my age with his wonder-filled eyes fixed on the picture. I was not aware that he had leaned against the bamboo post and stared at the picture. Perhaps he had observed me from the beginning till the end.

"Wow! The Oriya boy draws beautiful pictures!" I was somewhat

startled to be pushed a little bit by him before he completed the short sentence in a soft voice. But I got over my fright when he sat down with his hand on my shoulder and his awestruck eyes fixed on the picture. I took him to be someone very close to me at first sight. There was a vibration inside me. I was stirred both in body and mind. "I'll draw a picture for you if you give me a paper," I said. I was not sure if my Bengali was all right. But I said it anyway. He ran away holding on to the loose pant with one hand and biting on a half-finished guava with the other. I had glanced at his face for a while. The boy was extremely fair and somewhat thin. The thick eyebrows made him look fairer. The eyes seemed to glare at the world at large. There was a mysterious smile on his face which seemed to be slightly naughty. I compared him with Badal. There was a trace of simplicity in Badal's smile. He convulsed with laughter and laid himself bare. But this boy had a silent smile. It made him look intelligent. Only his lips indicated his smile. In a moment, the smile vanished. He was a slippery character. It was not easy to hold on to him. This fish swam in deep waters. One could win Badal's friendship easily. But one had to be a very experienced diver to fathom this fellow's mind. Badal was fickle, happy with small things. But this fellow was solemn. He would not leave you once he got hold of you. But he would think for a long time before holding on to you. But both were equally naughty.

I developed a liking for the mysterious stranger at the first sight for some reason. I could not control my wayward mind. Initially, I had thought of taking a dip in that solemnity of his. Why should one be so serious at such a young age! Everyone loved to unravel a mystery. I was anxious to do that too. Badals were available in plenty in this world. But it was difficult to find one like this. Now that I had to set out to look for the new, I decided to get to the bottom of things to know the mysterious and strange mind of

man. I forgot my studies. I waited expectantly for his arrival. He arrived like a typhoon with his eyes full of curiosity. The four eyes met that day. Those burning eyes had been seeking to discover my relationship with him over several births. I do not know if he discovered anything that day. Perhaps he did. Some indications were available from his face and eyes. But he did not find the words to freely express his feelings before a new friend from another state. One nerve had found another very carefully and silently.

The first meeting and the first touch had created great vibrations inside and outside the mind and the body. The oarless boat rocking on the waves had found the shore in him. But I had not been able to show my affection for him overtly. I had to repress my intense desire to do so. How could I let myself go without further examination! The bait was all right. But it was difficult to pull the fish out of the deep waters. I had to wait patiently. How could I accept life without purifying it by the test of fire? Friends were available everywhere. But where could one get a life's mate, an alter ego? I wanted a life's mate, sincerity that was washed with the pure water of the heart, boundless love – that love which would stand the ultimate test of fire. There was a simple sincerity and an unrestrained joy in Badal's friendship but there was no mystery in it. He was a straight line that went up and came down on its own. However, it was difficult to get up or come down a zigzag line. But there was the pleasure of unravelling a mystery, the joy of discovery and finding new facts in following such a line. The sadness in the mind disappeared amidst the joy of self-gratification and victory. This was that zigzag line. One had to be careful in handling him. All eagerness, curiosity and excitement remained buried in the mind. But the mind floated away to some distant land with the joy of fulfilment.

I was drawing the picture on his paper absentmindedly, as I was

lost in the world of dreams. Suddenly, he ran to the guava tree and climbed one of the branches of the tree like a monkey. He came back in a while and placed two guavas on my lap without saying a word. The honeymoon had passed off well. A sad looking girl was sitting at the other end of the verandah. Faced with some complex problem, she seemed to be in a contemplative mood. She looked worn out. The picture had already been drawn by that time. I did not even have a chance to look at it properly. The boy snatched it from my hands in a flash and handed it over to the girl. His eyes were dilated in amazement and he said, "Look at this, Didi. Such a beautiful picture drawn by this Oriya boy here!" The girl bit into a large guava while holding the picture and she seemed to have come alive all of a sudden. "Khoka, ask him to draw a picture on my handkerchief. Would he do it?" she asked and ran inside the house to get her handkerchief. I drew the picture of a flower on the handkerchief in no time. Later, I made a table cloth for her too. Many children from Subadepara lined up to get pictures drawn and I did not disappoint anyone. That day I felt that I had touched a chord in everyone's heart. I got an idea that those people had taken a liking to me at first sight. I received enough love and affection from them. I cannot measure it today even if I want to. There was a great deal of satisfaction amid great hardship. God was great. There was no end to His compassion.

Oh God,
You've filled an empty heart,
You've removed all fear,
In the sea of life,
Inside and outside,
Far and near,
Everywhere I go,
I only hear

You being hailed,
You being invoked,
Oh God!

A long week passed in this manner quite fast. I got several calls to draw pictures. Everyone fawned upon me. How generous and simple these people were! They had so much of affection for a stranger. What did I do for them? But the affection that I received was totally unexpected. I had thought I would manage to pass my time somehow if I could get the job of a servant somewhere. I was not even sure if someone would give me a job. I did not even have the time to think about the blessings of God that I had received. But my small mind believed that the darkness was gone and there was a ray of light on my path.

I was reading a book one morning as there was nothing else to do and I was trying to control my restless mind when suddenly, Jitenda, the daftary of the school, arrived. Ghoshbabu had sent him to take me to the school. Everyone was happy that I would be admitted to the school. Naranda and Badal had already left for the school by that time. I did not waste any time. I had to eat something quickly and leave for the school with Jitenda. The aunties had silently blessed me, putting a few Tulsi leaves of Narayana on my palm. I wondered what the future held for me. I have never been overjoyed with happiness nor broken down in grief. I walked slowly that day.

Pratulbabu, the headmaster, was sitting in the office. Other teachers were busy in their own work. But Pratulbabu's gaze was on me. I wished him with folded hands and stood like a sacrificial lamb. He had to take the decision about my fate. I was to be judged. Others ran their eyes over me fleetingly but I saw amazement and curiosity in those eyes. They might have had a different kind of feeling to find a boy from outside the state clad in a dhoti and chaddar. The school's children had been standing in a row behind

the office. Perhaps they were about to pray. The bell sounded and the prayer went on with the teachers in attendance. I glanced at them for a while. But I was not listening to the prayer. I do not know if I had been overtaken by fright. But some strange shiver ran down my body. It was not fear perhaps. Pratulbabu was a quiet, handsome and middle-aged person. He evoked respect, not fear. The tranquility on his face showed that he had empathy.

The environment of the school was something to remember. It was away from the din and bustle of the village. River Bhairav flowed on one side. The other three sides were full of greenery. It felt good to be there. The signs were good and auspicious. But there were conflicting emotions within me. I was between high tide and ebb tide. "Shall I succeed?" Doubts and hopes were playing hide and seek within me.

Till then, the bell did not sound for the classes to begin. Everyone was in the office. I was called and I went to him. I have not forgotten that look even now. My future was entwined with that meeting. As he put his hand on me, unruly tears of joy rolled down my cheeks and I was able to hear the music of a flowing spring in my dreary life. The raging storm in my mind was cleared in a moment. That affectionate touch gave birth to a new inspiration and courage in me and I became effusive. Holding my hand in his, Pratul Babu asked in a soft voice, "Can you speak Bengali?"

"I have learnt a bit after coming here."

"Where are you staying?"

"In the house of Nakuleswar Bhattacharya."

"Do you know how to read and write Bengali?"

"I know a little bit. But I would learn it quite fast."

"What class have you completed?"

"I have completed class seven in my village."

"So you would study in class eight, no?"

"Yes, Sir."

"The Puja vacation will start in a week. The examination for promotion to the next class will be held after the vacation. How can you learn the language and appear at the examination in such a short time? You have to write everything in Bengali."

"I can do it, Sir. I've faith in my abilities."

"All right. I'm really happy to meet you. I had heard about you from Ghoshbabu. Wait for a while. I'll be back."

Pratulbabu left the place for some time. I stood there alone. The classes had started. Sweat beads ran from my head into my mouth and I realised where I was. I started regaining my sense. I had been breathing very hard and I was drenched in sweat. I was in an excited state. Could I take up the challenge? Wherefrom had I come and where had I reached! From Bhubana, a village in Orissa, to Calcutta, the big city. And from there to Adilpur on the banks of River Bhairav. I could see those scenes one after the other as in a panorama. I could not even blink my eyes. I had always been first in my class until then. All my friends went to Dhenkanal High School after passing from the Bhubana Minor School. But my father thought that I was so young and dependent that it was impossible for me to manage on my own in the high school hostel. I was not old enough. But what about today? I was all by myself in a village in distant Bengal. No, I was not alone. Hundreds of people had stood by me in the past few days. I was not helpless. I had enough support behind me. I wish my father could see me today in this state. There was no end to my thoughts. They came one by one like the unruly waves of the raging sea. I had been standing on the beach of that sea and staring ahead in silent amazement. I had been totally lost to the outside world.

I was startled to hear the soft voice, "Listen, son. You are known to Subodh Babu. I am admitting you to the school on his request.

But you have to continue in the same class if you don't pass the examination. Do you understand?" Pratulbabu looked at me after saying this. I had to give an answer. I had already gathered enough courage and strength of mind in the meantime. I couldn't wait to answer. I felt that I had received the best prize of my life. I answered immediately, "Sir, I shall do my best to uphold your and Subodhbabu's prestige. You won't have any problem with me."

"Come from tomorrow, in that case. Do you understand?"

I paid my respects to everyone and returned home after completely surrendering myself to the hands of God.

I came to the bank of Bhairav and sat there. My mind was preoccupied with all kinds of thoughts. The past was floating before my restless mind. Abinash's boat was moving slowly to the bank on the other side with just one or two persons on it. The peaceful atmosphere of the afternoon had been made even more peaceful by Bhairav. The joy of victory had brought a tide in my mind's river. There was a flood of new thoughts. The old was making way for the new place, the new environment and the new lifestyle. It was the game of building and destroying, the game that these rivers had been adept at playing since time immemorial. The challenge had preoccupied my mind. Would I succeed? How could I succeed? All the questions were centred on this. There was everything in the house of Bhattacharya. There was love and affection, food and shelter. But there was no study environment. Everyone carried on in the usual way in that house. Cooking and eating went on from morning till night. The children were used to leading a relaxed life. They shouted a great deal all the time. The elders were constantly busy with their own affairs. No one ever thought that there was a huge world outside their home. I too had fallen to the same routine in the past few days. I had allowed myself to float on the same stream. But the problem persisted. There were no solutions in sight.

Who would show the path? It would have been different if Bhairav were a human being to sense my feelings.

"What are you thinking? Won't you share it with me?" A heavy hand fell on my shoulder. Badal had left the school and come. "Badal! You! Have you bunked school?"

"So what? It's nothing new. I bunk school on most of the days. How could I read when I do not know about your progress? Tell me first. What are you thinking about?"

"What is there to think? I'm sitting here just like that."

"Come, let's go. There's no fun in sitting here doing nothing."

"Where do I have to go with you? Go back to school. Let me go home."

"Let's go and drink some coconut water. I don't feel like going to the school."

He pulled me by my hand and led me to his garden before I could say anything. The recess in school had started by then and Badal had no problem in coming home. He just stuck to that one theme in spite of all my remonstrations, "Look, Laxman, I cannot do all this studying. I don't like it. But I'm very happy they are admitted to the school. I may not do it. But you should be serious in your studies. Don't tell anyone at home that I've bunked school. That won't be nice, I'm telling you." I had reassured him of it, setting his anxiety to rest. He told everyone at home about my admission in the school. I received enough greetings and blessings from the uncles and aunties.

I went to school the next day with Naranda and Badal. I did not want to wear shirt, pant and shoes. I was clad in my dhoti and chaddar. I was happy to see my new friend in school. But he was absolutely quiet in the school. I was introduced to many others that day. There were Kala, Hazari, Pabitra, Adhir, Ghedo, etc. There were no greetings. But those curious eyes constantly ran over me.

There were no questions. However, it was plain to feel that thousands of questions were stuck in their throats: different people, different language, and different conduct. Nothing was similar. There was peace on the surface but there was terrible suffering inside. This suffering was caused by not being able to lay one's heart bare.

There was an unknown pain inside as the door to the mind was closed. Still the first day passed off quite agreeably.

Jatra Pathe
Dhenkanal, Self-Published

Taranga and Jagdishbabu

Asim Basu

Translated by Ashok Kumar Mohanty

5A, Noor Mohammed Lane – The man repeated the words under his breath, time and again, as he came out of the office of the *Aasantakali*. He did not sleep that night. He could not concentrate on his work the next day either. He finally approached the entrance to a pitch dark lane. Nothing was visible inside the lane. He asked a few people about the location of 5A. Someone advised him to look for the house inside the lane. A few others did not bother to respond. The man stood at the entrance for a while. He could not come to a decision whether he should step into the lane or not. Perhaps another defeat stared him in the face. Why should he take a chance? He should rather return. But a bald, old man emerged from the darkness, coughing all the time, and stood before Asim Basu.

"Who are you looking for?"

"5A, Noor . . ."

"Come with me. You can't locate the house in the darkness even if I give you directions." The old man took him and left him in front of the gate of 5A. The sound of printing machines and a throaty laughter could be heard from inside. The man entered the house. He enquired about *Taranga* of the first man he met. He pointed at a dimly lit room with its doors open. A few people sitting inside the room seemed to be hatching a conspiracy.

Was this the office of a magazine? It could never be. Where was

the large table? Where were the stacks of notebooks supposed to be on the table? I felt then that the office of *Aasantakali* was a real office. And this place? It looked like an adda of dacoits usually seen in the movies. However, I did not have any option but to face the people inside the room since I had already stepped into it and by so doing had attracted their attention. So I asked to meet the editor of *Taranga*. The bulkiest of the men pointed at a broken chair for me to sit on. I took my seat and told him why I had come. All four of them stared at me for a while. Four persons – eight eyes had been staring at me since I came. It was highly disconcerting. But there was nothing that I could do about it. I had already barged into the adda. The fat man stared at me for a little longer and said, "The cover is already done. Can you draw pictures to be inserted inside the stories?"

"I'll do my best. If you like them …."

The fat man broke into a fit of laughter even before I had finished the sentence. I was confused for a while. Yes, it was the same laughter. I had heard it when I was outside the room.

"What did you say? Do we have to approve the pictures? No way. We had to select the artist and we've done our job. It's your job now to read the stories and draw pictures as you think fit. Our job is to print and that is what we will do. If the reading public likes your pictures, it's good. Otherwise, we would infer that we had failed in our job in choosing the artist." So I was to be tried straightaway in the court of the reading public.

Freedom. Total freedom. The first picture would be printed and I could do it in any which way. There was no one to supervise my work. The prospect was frightening. I thought I ought to flee from the place. I could not draw pictures on such terms. But how could I say that openly? So I carried the bundle of stories and returned home. I drew the pictures, using my own judgment. One

day I finally arrived at 5A, Noor Mohammed Lane with the pictures. I was introduced to the gang that day. The fat man, who looked like the leader of the gang and laughed convulsively every now and then, was Chaudhury Hemakanta Mishra, the writer of short stories. He was flanked by Biyotkesh Tripathy, the eminent writer, and Kanduri Charan Das, the author of mystery novels. I was not familiar with the writings of Biyotkesh or of Hemakanta. But I had read *Dine Ratire* written by Kanduri Charan. For the first time in my life, I came across an author whom I had read and who was right there in front of me in flesh and blood. Also, I came across a congregation of three authors for the first time in my life.

The Puja edition of *Taranga* was published. Along with the stories of *Taranga*, the pictures drawn by me were also published. I belonged to *Taranga* after that. *Taranga* belonged to me too. Hemakanta, Biyotkesh and Kanduri Charan became my friends.

My friends saw the magazine and said that I was no longer just Asim Basu. I was Asim Basu, the artist. My teachers in the college saw the magazine and said that I had gone astray. I would then run only after cheap praise and some easy money, forgetting my studies. I did not disappoint anyone – neither my classmates nor my teachers. I wanted to forget the sorrow and humiliation of severing my relationship with *Aasantakali*. Apart from *Taranga*, I also drew pictures for Biyotkesh and Kanduri Charan whenever they wanted. I also took up assignments of Oriya authors and publishers based in Calcutta whom I came to know through my association with *Taranga*. Sometimes I was paid ten rupees for a picture. Sometimes my honorarium was rupees twenty five. However, in most cases, I drew the pictures for free.

There were a few people who gave the impression that they were capable of doing something. They had an aura of invincibility

about them. Ask them anything and they would assure you that it would be done in no time.

I had met someone like that during my stay at Calcutta. I cannot exactly recall when and under what circumstances I had met him. Perhaps I had met him for the first time in a small room on the first floor of 182, Bowbazar Street. There were rows of jewellery shops on Bowbazar Street. The ground floor of Building No. 182 was also a jewellery shop. There was a narrow lane by the side of the building. A staircase led to the first floor on the right as one entered the lane. There were small wooden cubicles in a row on the right at the end of the staircase. One of those cubicles was the office of the Friends Press. I met my pals from Friends Press. But where was the press? There were a few racks to hold cases of letters. Besides, there was a small table, two chairs and a small bench in the room. Jagdishbabu was the owner of all these. He was also the owner of the press. Before meeting him, I had no idea that one could be the owner of a press without possessing one. When I got to know him better, I had a feeling that his philosophy of life was, "I am the Lord of all I survey. There is none to dispute my rights." It did not take me long to find out that Jagdishbabu was the owner of all the presses in and around Calcutta.

"Hari! Take the composition to the New India Press on the Sutarkin Street. Ask them to print seven thousand copies." Thus, Jagdishbabu was also the owner of the New India Press.

"Hari! Hand over Forma No. 7 to the Kalika Press on the Akhil Mistry Lane. Give a print order of twelve thousand on blue paper." The owner of the Kalika Press? Jagdishbabu, of course.

"Hey you, Hari! I had asked you to get two reams of paper from the Sandhya Tara Press on my account! Did you get it?"

The owner of the Sandhya Tara Press? Jagdishbabu, again.

Errand boys like Hari ran to Nabarun Press, Saraswati Press,

Gosain Press, Eagle Litho, etc. to deliver paper and get printed materials. Was there anything to doubt? Hence Jagdishbabu was the owner of all the presses. The friends of the Friends Press met in the evening. They chatted among themselves. Two chairs and a bench were not sufficient. But nothing could be done about it. The cubicle could not hold another chair. The discussion started with politics, moved to literature, and on some days, it terminated in the forbidden streets of Calcutta. Whatever was the topic of discussion, Jagdishbabu held sway over everyone else effortlessly.

Taranga was closed one day. Biyotkesh left Calcutta after completing his studies. Hemakanta too left in due course.

I finally triumphed after a series of defeats in life. Mohapatra Rajendra Kumar from *Aasantakali* appeared before House No. 234 one day and said that he needed pictures for the magazine.

Pictures were needed for *Aasantakali*.

I refused to work for the first time in life. I replied, "I'm sorry. I can't do it. I don't have the ability to draw pictures as per Bahadur's specifications."

I became a regular at Jagdishbabu's evening rendezvous after *Taranga* was closed.

One day, Friends Press shifted from the first floor of 182, Bowbazar Street to Hidaram Banerjee Lane. A treadle machine had been added to the letter case in the meantime. One had to go ten paces from the place where the Bowbazar vegetable market came to an end and turn left in order to get inside the Hidaram Banerjee Lane. The second house to the left inside the lane had a huge gate. Perhaps it was the residence of some Zamindar earlier. Why else would someone construct such a huge gate? There were large knobs on the door. There was a large courtyard beyond the door. There was a flight of steps leading to the large verandah.

There was a narrow verandah to the left of the courtyard. A

small room was there at the corner of the verandah. Perhaps, it was a servant's quarters during the zemindari days. It had now turned into Jagdishbabu's Friends Press. The room had been divided in two parts. Jagdishbabu's table was in the front. There were two chairs and a small bench there. The rack of letter cases served as a partition. The compositor and the treadle machine shared the rear portion. Debenbabu was the new machine man. While Jagdishbabu gave sermons to the friends of the Friends Press on the upheavals in Orissa politics on one side, Debenbabu sermonized the compositor on Bengal politics on the other. Jagdishbabu was not just the owner of the press, he was an editor too. I was closely associated with *Taranga*. I was also the artist for *Samavesha*, the irregular magazine brought out by Jagdishbabu at a later stage. I cannot say whether the number of orders placed in hand increased after the installation of the treadle machine. But I could clearly see that several creditors were after Jagdishbabu, pressing for payment. But Jagdishbabu never seemed worried on that account. He had a way with men. I had seen many people scurrying away like mice after talking to Jagdishbabu even though they had arrived in an extremely agitated state.

Kathare Kathare

Bhubaneswar, Lark Books, 2000

Presidency and Later
Gobind Das

Translated by Ashok Kumar Mohanty

I learnt one thing from the Presidency College. One got the idea that he was part of something big. Small things had no role to play in life. This was not a matter of self-aggrandizement. It was a matter of self-confidence. Many successful people have studied there. They are proud of their college. The number of students in the college was small. Only select students studied there. There was an air of self-confidence and pride in the environment of the college and the hostel. The college warden once said that the students of the Presidency College would never have smoked Capstan. Ordinarily, they would not smoke. But when they did smoke they would smoke only Gold Flake. Gold Flake was a costly cigarette then.

Calcutta seemed to open up through the Presidency. The coffee house of the college was an institution in its own right. Not just coffee everything under the sun, including politics, art and culture, was available there. The coffee house was a distinguished part of Calcutta culture of the time. New artists, student leaders and leftists started their revolution from the place. Many careers came to an end there too. It was a familiar place for the writers and journalists. 'Adda' was a serious matter. It was not just a collection of people but a club of intellectuals. Such 'addas' were seen in the city of Paris in its coffee houses. Sartre sat surrounded by the supporters and opponents of his philosophy. The civilisation of Bengal developed because of such 'addas'. Such 'addas' had one day helped develop

French civilisation. The coffee house was an example of that 'adda'.

The Presidency was on the College Street. The College Street was the intellectual hub of Calcutta. Books talked there. Inquisitive people surrounded by heaps of books were found everywhere. Someone talked about Buddhism. Someone else talked about Einstein. All kinds of books were available there starting from the autobiography of Bertrand Russell to books on how to quit smoking. College Street had an aroma of its own. The readers of Calcutta drank it in. The fragrance seemed to come from history. One wondered how to know all there was to know. I went to these bookshops and the coffee house at times with others.

Uttam Kumar and Suchitra, who had interpreted Sarat Chandra and his novels in cinemas, taught me how to love. I understood the concept of platonic love only by seeing their movies. I had never realised until then that love and worship were so close to each other.

Girls took admission in the Presidency for the first time that year. I dreamt them at times. The love affairs of middle class people at the time were extremely intimate and based on sacrifices. Once there was a pandemonium in the Eden Hostel. Two young men were in love with one girl. One of them had a relationship with the girl while the other loved her silently. The day the girl got married to the former, the latter committed suicide during the course of the night. Both the young men stayed in our hostel. This was the ultimate demonstration of love.

I started seeing English movies on Sunday mornings. In one movie, Ava Gardener was the leader of a gang while Gregory Peck was the leader of another gang. Gregory Peck blew rings of cigarette smoke on Ava Gardener's face. I tried to blow similar rings after coming out of the hall. Ava Gardener is gone. Gregory Peck too is gone. But I was left with my cigarettes. We are together

even now. Small things had great influences on the body and the mind.

Jitendra Mohanty was our senior. He is now a professor in America. He has authored several books on philosophy. Once he read one of his essays on Aurobindo and on Hegel in a seminar. His professor praised him profusely. We were proud of him. Without his knowing it, he was our role model. He wore khaddar. He was a wise and decent person. It could be known even then. He was as proficient in sports as he was in studies. He was the son of Jagannath Mohanty who was a judge in the High Court of Orissa at the time.

The influence of Communists and Socialists was evident in the behavior of the students of the Presidency at the time. Jaya Prakash Lohia, Ashok Mehta, Acharya Narendra Dev, Achyut Patvardhan etc. were prominent leaders among the Socialists. Aruna Asaf Ali was in charge of the organisation in Bengal. Shailen and I used to draw caricatures of Marx while at Cuttack and we were happy about it. I knew a little bit about Marx, Gandhi, Vivekananda and Ramakrishna. I too thought of joining the Socialist Party after being familiar with the life stories of these people. I had thought of giving up my studies and joining the Party as a full-time worker. I met Aruna Asaf Ali and asked her about it. She enquired about my family and background. She dissuaded me from doing so after being aware of everything. She advised me to complete my studies. Several good students from the Presidency College took part in the Naxal Movement at a later stage.

The communal riot and Gandhiji were the major events of the time. Most of the communal riots took place in Calcutta. Suhrawardy of the Muslim League was the Prime Minister of Bengal at the time. Calcutta seemed to have turned into a river of blood. Everyone was scared. Shrieks of people could be heard everywhere. Gandhiji moved around Calcutta and Noakhali at the time. A few

students of the Presidency College met him. He convened a meeting of students in Calcutta. It was attended by a large number of students. They had carried thousands of posters written in Bengali and English. Gandhiji had come to the meeting accompanied by Suhrawardy. The posters demanded that Suhrawardy should be dismissed since he had unleashed a reign of terror on women. Many other posters carried slogans against him. The Bengali gentleman sitting near Gandhiji interpreted the Bengali posters for him. He was listening to everything with a smile on his face. The agitated students shouted slogans of 'Suhrawardy, resign'. Gandhiji started his lecture sitting on the dais. Everyone fell quiet. First, he said, "Suhrawardy is our guest. The insult of a guest is an insult to us." Then he raised his voice and asked the students to remove the posters. No one paid any heed. The posters were not lowered. Then he shouted at the students in a shrill voice and asked them again to remove the posters. Thousands of posters in the hands of the students of Calcutta were lowered. There was a command in his voice which drove crores of Indians. There was affection, authority and empathy in that voice. He fell quiet for a while. Then he said that he had not come to a meeting of the students for a long time. He explained the virtues of patience and courage to the students. He asked them to patrol the streets at night to restore peace in their areas. The residents of Eden Hostel took to patrol the streets. One felt like a responsible person after returning from that meeting of Gandhiji. Small things like revenge did not matter any longer. Everyone believed that they had been elevated.

Sana Gotie Jibana
Cuttack, Orissa Bookstore, 2006

Calcutta – The City of Memories
Narendra Narayan Dash

Translated by Ashok Kumar Mohanty

Whenever I go to different cities in India on official work or for pleasure, I make it a point to move around the bookshops. One has to go, any way, to large shops like Strand, Oxford, Landmark, Crossword, Higginbothams etc. But there is a different kind of pleasure in moving around shops selling second-hand books. Daryaganj in Delhi, Moor Market near Madras Central (where the huge booking office of the Railways stands now after the market was destroyed by fire), Fort and Flora Fountain areas in Mumbai and the College Street area of Calcutta are famous for old and rare books. I have gone several times to these places. However, while living in Calcutta, I discovered many shops located in other areas from where I have been able to collect several rare books for my personal library. Apart from College Street, old books are also available in areas like Golpark, Gariahat Market, Fern Road, Wellington, Dalhousie Road, Eliot Street, Free School Street etc. The financial condition of those booksellers was not good. But that had nothing to do with their values and humanity. They were in the business of selling books to eke out a living for themselves. But they were not greedy and dishonest people. There was a bit of problem in bargaining with them in the beginning. But there was no further problem when I got acquainted with them. At times, they refused to sell books reserved for me to someone else even if they were offered more money. My relationship with them continues

even up to this day. Whether or not I buy a book is immaterial. But Rantu, Santu and Bablu of Dalhousie, Santosh of Golpark, Jaladhar of Gariahat Market, the Hindustani bookseller of Fern Road, Iqbal of Wellington and Mallick of Free School Street are still overjoyed when they see me.

Calcutta is a city of culture. It is a city of books too. Calcutta Book Fair is a unique experience. The festive mood seems to be in the air. Most of the book shops in Calcutta remain closed for about a fortnight in order to participate in the book fair. Book lovers seem to be everywhere. The fair continues for twelve days. Publishers and book sellers from all over the country throng the place with their wares. The Calcutta Book Fair provides a golden opportunity to the collectors of books. Many rare books can be seen at the Fair. Many valuable books are available there at reasonable prices. I had gone to the Calcutta Book Fair for the first time many years ago with Prakash Mohapatra, my friend. We were supposed to reach Calcutta in the morning and return in the evening. We moved around for about an hour in the Fair. Prakashbabu wanted to spend his time in the stalls selling Bengali books while I was interested in other stalls. We did not have much time in our hand. So we decided to meet at a predetermined spot after an hour. It was beyond our imagination then that one hour was not at all sufficient to move around the Calcutta Book Fair. I went around the Fair and returned to the spot in exactly an hour. I waited for Prakashbabu for a long time there. But there was no sign of him. So I went in search of him. I returned several times to the afore-mentioned spot. But I again left the place to locate him when I did not find him there. We met each other after about two hours at around five thirty in the evening. I learnt that he too had come several times to the spot and gone in search of me when he did not find me there. We had wasted about two hours in the process. We had made reservations

on the Jagannath Express for our return journey. So we left for the railway station without any further delay. That was the beginning of my love affair with the Calcutta Book Fair. Since that day I had conceived a wish to spend sufficient time at the Calcutta Book Fair some time. My desire was fulfilled in 1994 when I was posted to Calcutta. My office was initially located in Hair Street of Calcutta. Later it shifted to the seventh floor of the Apeejay House in the Park Hotel complex on the Park Street. I could clearly see the Book Fair from the window of my office room. There was no further hurdle in moving around the Book Fair to my heart's content. My long-cherished dream was finally fulfilled.

The Calcutta Book Fair started in 1976 through the efforts of the Calcutta Publishers and Booksellers Union. The first fair was inaugurated on March 9, 1976 in the open Maidan in front of the Birla Planetarium with just 54 book stalls. The fair was held in the Maidan near Park Street from 1991 to 2007. This is the centre of Calcutta. So it did not take long for the Book Fair to be extremely successful. About eight to nine hundred stalls were put up. The crowd was simply mind-boggling. Hundreds of people bought tickets costing rupees two or three and queued up in front of different gates to enter inside. One can understand why Bengal is so far ahead in the field of culture when one looks at so many book lovers gathered at one place. The most noticeable thing in the Calcutta Book Fair is the genuine love of the Bengalis for their mother tongue. Books in English and other languages are sold in plenty in the Book Fair. But the commitment of the Bengalis towards their mother tongue can be seen clearly when one finds thousands of people carrying Bengali books in polythene bags, bearing the names of Bengali publishers and booksellers.

The Book Fair continued there for a long time. It was shifted to the Salt Lake Stadium in North Kolkata in 2007 because of several

problems and after the intervention of the High Court. However, the richness of the Calcutta Book Fair had lessened to a great extent. Only 650 stalls were put up. The crowd too was not encouraging. It was shifted to the Park Circus maidan in 2008. Many established publishers and booksellers did not participate in that fair. Hence, it was unsuccessful. The Book Fair was organised in a more systematic manner at the Milan Mela Prangan in North Kolkata from that year. My firm belief is that the enterprising and refined people of Bengal would not allow such a cultural tradition to die out. Such belief has developed out of my own experience. I was once moving around in the Calcutta Book Fair in the year 1997 when I found a crowd in front of a book stall. A spark of fire could be seen on top of the stall. It spread everywhere in no time and the Book Fair turned into a ball of fire in a few minutes. There were cries of despair everywhere. The efforts made to save the books from fire caused more harm than good. The water used to extinguish the fire damaged the books even more. In no time, Buddhadev Bhattacharya, the culture-loving Minister of the Police Department, arrived on the spot along with high ranking police officers. Standing amidst the ruins of the Book Fair, he declared that the Book Fair would be restored to its original glory within four to five days. It seemed impossible. Yet, the Book Fair rose from the ashes like the phoenix. Government and non-government organisations bought the half-burnt books of the booksellers on auction. Thousands of culture-loving people returned again to the Book Fair to give it a new lease of life.

Memories about the Calcutta Book Fair are still fresh in my mind. The tea stall owner Rakhal would never accept money for the first cup of tea on the first day of the Book Fair in spite of all my persuasions. He always kept a few cups of tea in his kettle and waited for us to appear before his shop closed. He knew that a

few of his regular customers would drop in to have a cup of tea before they left the Book Fair. I took Sangram Jena, a friend of mine, to Rakhal's shop for a cup of tea after both of us were exhausted from our tour of the Book Fair. The evenings in Calcutta, towards the end of January and the beginning of February, are quite enchanting. There is a slight chill in the air in late evenings. I went to Rakhal's shop for tea. But Sangrambabu went there attracted by the warmth of the environment. As we were having the last cup of tea one day in Rakhal's shop, we found a young man and a young woman sipping tea and engaged in a heated discussion. We could make out that the animated discussion was related to Shakespeare and his works.

I met Adelina Patriki, director of the Taj Publishers, a distinguished publishing house of Romania, at the Book Fair. She is a great admirer of Indian literature and culture. She has collected a large number of books on Indian culture. She is engaged in translating many of these books into the Romanian language. She had visited Orissa a long time back and had been charmed by the art and the architecture of Orissa. We have often had thoughtful discussions on Mircea Eliade and Maitreyi Devi in her book stall in the Book Fair. Even now, I can recall the question an elderly author of Sweden asked me at the Book Fair, "Do parents in India still search for brides and grooms for their children?"

This relates to another incident. It was the last day of the Calcutta Book Fair. It was around nine thirty in the evening. I had spent all my money on buying books since everyone started packing up by eight thirty. I just had a little more than the money needed for my fare back home. I heard someone calling me as I was about to leave the Fair. I found a man sitting on a bench with ten to twelve books by his side and looking in my direction. I cast a glance at the books and found *Black Rain* by Masuki Ibuse, *A Dark Night's Passing*

by Naoya Shiga and a few other books. The books were dirt cheap. But I was not in a position to buy more than one or two. I had never felt as badly as I had done then at any other time in my life.

As I was once looking at books in a book store in Free School Street, my gaze fell on a book in the rack meant for books on foreign languages. It was a poetry collection of Federico Garcia Lorca, the world famous poet and playwright of Spain, in original Spanish. A young couple from overseas entered the shop. The young woman was overjoyed to see Lorca's book in my hand and asked me something in a foreign language. When I could not understand her, she asked me in English, "Are you buying this book?" I asked her, "Are you interested in buying it?" She introduced herself and said, "Both of us belong to Spain. We've set off on a tour of South Asia. Currently, we're touring India. The book you're holding in your hand is the poetry collection of our very popular poet Garcia Lorca. His poems are sung in every household in Spain. I have several poetry collections of Lorca with me. So I don't need this one right now. But I am curious to know why you are buying the book when you do not know Spanish." I said, "Lorca has a special place in the hearts of those Indians who have an interest in poetry. Besides, the plays of Lorca are highly influential. Many of his plays have been successfully staged in various places in India. Apart from his poems, his plays like *Blood Wedding* and *The House of Bernarda Alba* are indeed heart-touching. A few of his plays have also been broadcast over the radio and television. A few Oriya poets and music directors have been greatly influenced by Lorca. I have translations of Lorca's poems and plays in English and in other languages with me. But I have a desire to read the creations of Lorca, Paz, Neruda and other distinguished authors in the original Spanish some day. Hence, I'm collecting some such books. I've already collected a few books written by Neruda, Sela and Paz in

the original Spanish." She was so happy to hear this that she took the book from my hand and started reciting poem after poem from the book in a melodious voice. She kept dancing to the tune even as she sang. It seemed as if Lorca's god daughter had descended from his poetry collection like an angel to transform his poems into songs. I could not understand the poems that she recited. But the echoes of the songs sung by that beautiful Spanish girl stir me even now in my lonely moments.

Mohan Tiwary is the owner of one of the few book shops on the south side of the Grand Hotel. The Globe and Lighthouse movie halls are opposite to it. I spent some time with the extremely old Mohan Tiwary whenever I went to the shop. He too loved to narrate a few of his experiences to me. Mohan Tiwary was not highly educated. But he had decided to make his fortune in the business of books and had also been successful in it. In due course, he gathered a lot of knowledge about the world of books. Once I was in his shop towards the end of September. Mohan Tiwary asked me, "Why don't the newspapers these days publish the names of writers likely to win the Nobel Prize? This is the time when the names of the winners are ordinarily announced. A lot of information was available earlier in the newspapers about this." I said, "The Swedish Academy doesn't let out any information about the possible winners before the announcement of the names. The journalists only make a guess and provide information about the possible winners." He asked me, "Who do you think would win the Prize for literature this year?" I said, "Many names are being heard. The names of Philip Roth and Joyce Carol Oates of America, Doris Lessing of Britain, Margaret Duras of France and several other names are doing the rounds for a long time. In recent years, however, a few writers have been awarded the Nobel Prize. They are extremely weighty and influential, although they are hardly known to us." He

said, "You're right. Who had heard of Kenjaburo Oe, Szimborska and Dario Fo? I've been in this business for such a long time. But I had not sold a single book of these authors before they received the Prize. However, their books sold like hot cakes once they received the Nobel Prize." He fell quiet for a while. It seemed that he was ruminating over the past. He said again, "Sir, this had happened a long time back. But it seems like yesterday. I had just started my business at the time. Many writers, professors and other decent people had started coming to my shop. An English professor of the Presidency College asked me one day if I had any book written by Albert Camus. I asked him if he was a famous writer. He said that his name was being tipped for the Nobel Prize that year. I said, "In that case, I've to get a few of his books." Of course, I had seen a few books of Camus with the distributors. I went immediately to the chief distributor of Penguin and bought a few books of Camus. One day I found a few people loitering before my shop as I was going to open it in the morning. They seemed to be highly educated. They surrounded me and asked me questions about Camus' books the moment I got inside the shop. I asked them if Camus had won the Nobel Prize. They snatched the few books of Camus available with me. They did not even bother to look at the titles. I came to know later that no book of Camus was available in any other book shop of Calcutta. But those people had heard from the aforementioned professor of the Presidency College that I had a few books of the author. As I switched on the radio to listen to the news, I heard that Albert Camus, the distinguished French-Algerian author, had been chosen to receive the Nobel Prize for literature for that year.

Afterword
K. K. Mohapatra

Having been a resentful, and, often fuming, victim of dreary, dreadfully boring and long-winded "keynote addresses" one time too many, it is far from my intention to inflict one on you this morning. In fact, I wish to make short work of the "inauguration speech" so that you can get on with the more exciting business you have ahead of you.

Translating has been a thrilling and highly satisfying creative activity for me. I find it every bit as fulfilling as writing my own stuff. Although a whole lot of people look down upon it as a secondary, second-rate engagement, happily for me I am not one of them. Just sit back for a moment and think where would we have been without all those glorious translations? Would we ever have discovered Dostoevsky, Marquez, Singer, Kafka, Camus, Borges, Neruda, Llosa, to name just a few, and a hundred other mind-blowing writers who have made life more bearable for us, who have made us look at the world in a significantly different light, and who chose to write in languages that we don't know, and wouldn't know in the normal course of things? World literature would be so much the poorer if there were no translations from one language to another. Remember what Borges said of Dostoevsky? Like the discovery of love, like the discovery of the sea, the discovery of Dostoevsky, Borges said, marks an important date in one's life. That's one great writer paying homage to another, thanks to translation. Think of the devastating, all-time-great story like Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Gimple the Fool*, which the world wouldn't have

known had it not been translated from the Yiddish by Saul Bellow. There are hundreds of examples of major writers translating other major writers. So whenever you read a writer who writes in a language you do not know, thank your lucky stars that somebody has brought him to you in a language that you can understand. That is precisely what you are going to do in this workshop: bring two languages together. Translation is not merely about comparing two languages, said Umberto Eco, but about interpreting a text in two different languages. Lost in translation is a much-bandied-about expression. Unless a piece of translation is grossly, viciously, horribly, unimaginably incompetent, something in which the text is completely mutilated, mauled, in which case it is no worse than an act of assassination – and in my opinion translators who produce such texts have no business trying their hand at it in the first instance – every translation is a gain. So lost in translation? No, in my opinion – gained in translation. A new audience gained. So for every apparent, invisible loss there is palpable, visible gain. Loss is notional. And my only word of advice to you when you are setting out on your job is to stop worrying about it, to stop listening to people who carp about transmission loss. Some of it is inevitable, inherent in the very activity itself. On the other hand, start obsessing about the quality of work you are producing. Translating from an Indian language into English is never easy, even under the best of circumstances, and often leaves much to be desired. My grouch, something that is shared by a whole lot of readers, is that most Indian translations do not read as well as translations from European languages. In fact, while reading Marquez, Tolstoy, Singer, Sartre, Kafka, Amado, we don't even realise that we are reading them in translation. There could be two reasons underlying this. One, the European languages share a lot; two, they have top class full-time professional translators at work. In contrast, most translations from Indian languages

invariably engage the readers at two levels: they find themselves reacting to the story as well as to the quality of translation. This kind of distraction can be injurious to the cause of enjoying the work in question. I partly share Salman Rushdie's observation that some great Indian writers have been ill-served by their translators. I don't find the Indian translators' job enviable at all. I understand only too well the hard work, the anguish, the despair that goes into producing a lively, a hugely readable, enjoyable work of translation. In India, where we have no fewer than twenty-three major languages, we need more people taking to translating, taking to translating as a mission, taking to translating as if their life depended on it, if we hope to discover and glory in our great writers.

In this two-day workshop you will be translating select excerpts from Oriya autobiographies on images of Kolkata.

I discovered the wonderful world of Oriya autobiographies thanks to my good friend – and incidentally the director of this workshop – Dr Jatindra Kumar Nayak. Until Jatin and I started working on a bibliography of Oriya autobiographies, which is far from being finished, I had no idea that there were so many such writings. We have been able to identify up to two hundred autobiographies. This might be small compared to the number from other Indian languages, but it was an eye-opener for us because all we get in the bibliographies of well-known researchers of Oriya autobiographies is a paltry list of some fifty or sixty odd titles.

As a people, it seems to me, Oriyas have been quite averse to writing their memoirs. Most people have felt that only those who have been at the helm of public affairs are entitled to write their memoirs.

Fascinating memoirs have been left behind not by politicians and administrators, the two categories of people who proverbially have suffered from exaggerated notions of self-importance, thinking

they mattered while they lived, but by ordinary people who simply recorded all they had seen, all they had gone through. Teachers, writers, artists, performers, social workers, doctors, engineers and people of seemingly no consequence at all, like, for example, my mother, have left behind fantastic memoirs that delight and enlighten us. Like always, I'll not miss this opportunity of mentioning my "most favourite" Oriya autobiography, "The Story of My Leaking Boat" (*Mo Phuta Dangara Kahani*), by the inimitable humorist Phaturananda. How I'd have loved him to write a little about Kolkata so that maybe you'd have had a try at translating it in this workshop. Unfortunately, Phaturananda was stricken by leprosy while still quite young – he was studying to be a doctor himself – and never stirred out of Cuttack.

Of late there seems to be quite a spurt in autobiographical writing in Orissa, which is a very encouraging, very healthy sign. Both Jatin and I can claim some little credit for this because we never miss broaching the idea to whoever we meet. Between us we must be directly responsible for some – how many, about eight, ten? – memoirs already and counting.

The impression of places in autobiographies can make for very absorbing reading. Unlike travelogues, which deal with places in great detail, what gets into autobiographies is the distilled memory of the place. And for me, as it is with many, a place is not just a place, a geographical portion; it is people. A place is a living, breathing, throbbing space. True, its longitude, latitude, altitude, heat, humidity, dust, dirt, roads, transportation, architecture, sights, sounds, smell, crowd, population all matter, but only as significantly as do its economy, environment, entertainment, culture, to say nothing of its hopes, its promises. Why you go to a place, whether for business, education, employment or sightseeing; how you get there, whether by train, plane, bus, boat, bullock-cart, or on foot; how long you

stay there, a short spell or an extended period or the rest of your life; the age and time of your life when you go there and, most importantly, who you think you are and who people think you are; all these and many more details – minute but uniquely personal – determine your outlook on and impression of a place. Much depends on how the place treated you and what you treasure of it in your memory. And no two people will ever view the same place in the same light. For example, Fakir Mohan Senapati, the first autobiographer in modern Oriya, made two trips to Calcutta, but all he records of the first trip is the back-breaking bullock-cart ride during the outward journey and the terrible storm he ran into while taking a boat back home. His second visit to Calcutta, to see the first industrial fair of 1873, does not merit more than a line saying he was away at Calcutta for fifteen days or twenty. This just goes to show how summarily a place can be disposed of in an autobiography. In contrast, his contemporary the redoubtable Govind Rath visited Calcutta in 1873 to see the industrial fair, and, on his return, wrote not only *Mahamela Darshan*, which is a highly interesting verse account of the exhibits, but also *Kalikata Bhraman*, which we have not been able to lay our hands on until now. Rath also wrote *Katak Darshan*, which goes to show how much he valued places. Talking of places being summarily disposed of, Mark Twain came to Calcutta on a lecturing trip in 1896, which was not one of those fly-in-fly-out kind of visits, but remembered it in his autobiography merely as the place where he ran into a girl he had a boyhood crush on. By the way, that bit from his autobiography – the chapter's called *Playing 'Bear', Herrings, Jim Wolf and the Cats* – is not to be missed for anything in the world. I think we should plan another workshop where the participants will read out their favourite bits from an autobiography so I'll have a chance to read this bit from Twain which sends me into paroxysms of helpless laughter

every time I read it.

Coming back to Calcutta, it is a much loved and much loathed place. Find, if you can, a more uninviting spot than Calcutta, said George Trevelyan. Rudyard Kipling called it the city of dreadful night. The most wicked place in the universe, castigated Robert Clive. My god, the universe! What did a ruthless, opportunistic soldier like Clive know of the universe? A dying city, said Rajiv Gandhi, which made the left-ruled 'red' city see red. Hyperboles can be boring. But just as there are people who run the place down, there are people who'd dream of no other place to love and live in the rest of their life than Calcutta. Listen to Simon Winchester: "Calcutta is a city in a state of permanent surprise, where amazement is around every crumbling corner, and astonishment lurks over every rickshaw-puller's shoulder. It is a city that never ceases to shock those who pass through, and it is also a city that manages to delight and enthral those who are stalwart enough to stay and brave enough to make an effort to look, and to see." Listen to Geoffrey Moorhouse: "Calcutta is both a monstrous and marvellous place." Let me just quote a few short bits from Moorhouse on things about Kolkata that hit a visitor the moment he lands up. Smells: "the air reeks of worn-out engine fumes mixed with half a dozen varieties of decay". The crowd: "pushing and shoving and sidestepping past buses, minibuses, trams, rickshaws, people and animals". Noise: "symphony of honks and clatters and clangs and rumbles and shouts, with transistored obligatos on the sitar". The heat: "searing the city to the bone, liquefying the tar on the road that then goes oozing down the drains, and expanding the colossal steel mesh that is Howrah Bridge – it becomes four feet longer by day than by night". But did any of these deter Moorhouse from discovering what lay underneath? Both he and Simon Winchester, who loved every minute of their stay in the city, have left behind memorable

books on it. Then there are some people, like Gunter Grass, who seem to love it while they live in it but loathe and revile it after they go away.

I have lived in this city for over twelve years in three spells, but I don't claim to know it. My wife comes from this city and she says she knows it even less than I do. No place is fully knowable. Sometimes, when the weather is good, the transport air-conditioned, the company stimulating, the food delectable, the conversation absorbing, I love the place. Other times, when stuck in a traffic snarl caused by one of those infernal precessions that resident Kolkatans loath but the rest of the West Bengal population love, when the company is uncouth, uninformed, jingoistic, painfully parochial, when the big rains flood the city, when there is a bundh on a day you have to get in or out of Kolkata, I deeply despise the place. I suppose this is human nature. For us, a place is good and bad by turns, interesting and boring by turns. We view a place according to our need, convenience, comfort, company, self-fulfilment and opportunities for entertainment and betterment.

Like you, I too am curious to know how our ancestors looked upon Kolkata, what took them there, how this city treated them. We need to keep in mind that until 1912 this place was the seat of the British imperial government and also the headquarters of the Bengal Presidency, of which Orissa was part ever since it came under British rule in 1803. History tells us that Oriya-Bengali relations of this period were uneasy, that the Bengali bureaucrats ran a mini-imperialism over the Oriyas for over a hundred years. History also tells us that the demise of the 19th century Oriya aristocracy was largely due to the fact that the seat of power and administration was located so far away from Orissa. But, please remember, history always talks of people in plural; autobiographies talk of people as individuals. History is about broad currents of events, autobio-

graphies are about close encounters. At the individual level, Bengalis seem to get on as well with Oriyas as Oriyas do with them. There is no Bengali worth his salt who hasn't been to Puri. I don't have the statistics, but nearly one-fourth of all inter-provincial marriages in Bengal are Oriya-Bengali marriages. Love obviously works in mysterious ways and does not give a damn for history!

Well, this is going to be a truly revealing workshop for us all: Kolkata revealed, Oriya autobiographies revealed, the pleasures and pains of translating revealed.

28 March 2009

NOTES ON AUTHORS

Alekh Das: Freedon fighter and author of *Jibanara Daka*, his autobiography.

Asim Basu: Well known painter, illustrator and stage designer.

Biashnab Pani: Playwright whose plays enjoyed unprecendented popularity in Orissa and Bengal in the first half of 20th century.

Bikram K. Das: Eminent man of letters and a medical scientist. Author of several novels and short stories.

Gobind Das: Eminent lawyer and the author of the novel *Amabasyara Chandra* and the travelogue *Dese Dese*.

Gobinda Chandra Mishra: Eminent freedon fighter, Member of Parliament and one of the earliest followers of Gandhi.

Godabarsih Mishra: Freedon fighter, educationist and dramatist and one of the founders of the historic Satyavadi School in Puri district.

Kanduri Chandra Das: An acclaimed writer of detective fiction and a magazine editor.

Lakshmana Mishra: Not much is known about him.

Manmohan Choudhury: Eminent Gandhian and freedon fighter. A leader of the Bhoodan movement; author of several well-received books in Oriya and English on economics, popular science and Gandhian thought.

Narendra Narayan Das: Essayist, translator, bibliophile and publisher.

Nilamoni Routray: Freedon fighter, trade union leader and Chief Minister of Orissa.

Pabitra Mohan Pradhan: Freedon fighter and Deputy Chief Minister of Orissa.

Panchanan Mohanty: A man of letters and an active propagator of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.

Notes on Translators

Ashok Kumar Mohanty: He has translated the short stories of Chandra Sekhar Ratha, Binapani Mohanty. He has recently translated the autobiography of Justice Harihar Mohapatra's autobiography *Jiban O Jibika.*

Jyotirmayee Mishra: Former student of the Department of English, Utkal University. She is at present engaged in teaching at Ekalavya Institute of Engineering and Technology, Bhubaneswar.

Mary Mohanty: Well-known translator. She translated into English the major novels of Kuntala Kumari Sabat for her PhD. She is also the translator of Sridhar Das's autobiography *A Leaf in the Stream* (Rupantar 2006). She teaches English at Govt. Women's College, Puri.

Nibedita Sahu: Former student of the Department of English, Utkal University. At present she works in a bank.

Prashanta Kumar Purohit: Teaches English at Veden College, Bargarh. He is engaged in translating Kanhu Charan Mohanty's novel *Jhanja* for his PhD.

Priyadarshi Pattanaik: Teaches at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT, Kharagpur. His English translation of Bidyutprabha Devi's poems has been published by Rupantar in 2010.

Priyamvada Pal: She has translated Bairagi Charan Mishra's autobiography *A Story of Struggle* (Rupantar 2008). At present she is engaged in teaching at the Silicon Institute of Technology, Bhubaneswar.

Sachidananda Mohanty: Professor of English, University of Hyderabad. He has won the Katha Award in 1992. He has edited *Early Women's Writings in Orissa 1898-1950: A Lost Tradition.* His book *Gender and Cultural Identity in Colonial Orissa* was published by Orient BlackSwan in 2008.

Sangram Jena: Well-known translator and poet. He edits *Nishant*, a literary magazine in Oriya.

Sarthak Abhyuday: Former student of the Department of English, Utkal University. At present, he works as a content writer at OTV, a popular television channel of Orissa.

Snehaprava Das: Well-known translator. She has translated into English classic Oriya novels such as *Padmamali* (Grassroots, 2005), *The World Within* (Rupantar, 2008) and *Bibasini* (forthcoming from Rupantar). She teaches English at Binayak Acharya College, Berhampur, Ganjam.

The excerpts from Oriya autobiographies assembled in this will enlarge and deepen Orissa's complex, many-hued relationship with Calcutta, or Kolkata, as it is now called.

This book will prove to be an invaluable resource for scholars and researchers keen on understanding the dynamics of regional co-operation in the context of the emergence of Kolkata as a contested site of modernity.

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